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FAMILY READINGS

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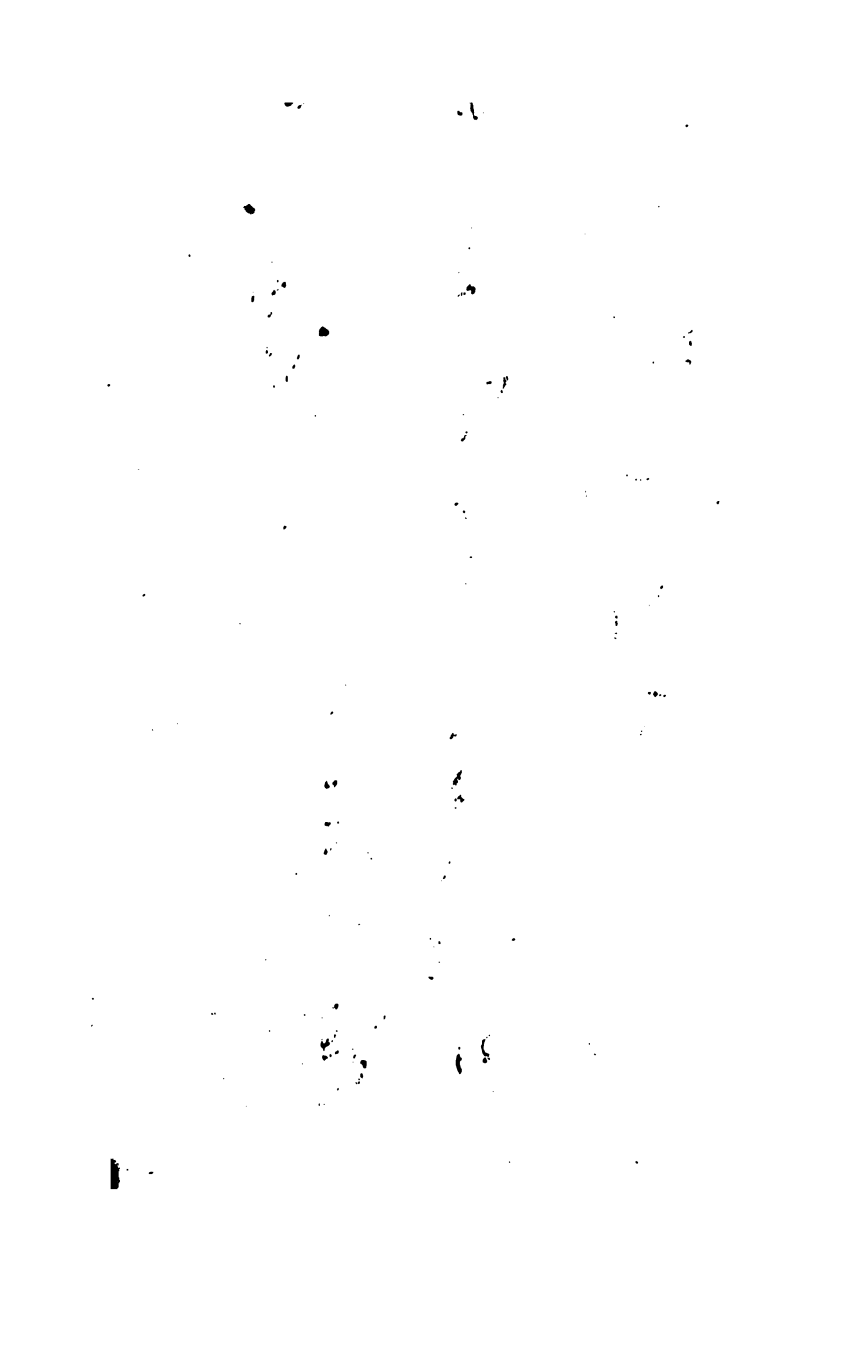
THESSALONIANS



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FAMILY READINGS.



FAMILY READINGS

ON

ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS.

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM NIVEN, B.D.

AUTHOR OF 'THOUGHTS ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD,' 'FAMILY READINGS
ON THE PHILIPPIANS,' ETC.

'To go about to explain any of St. Paul's Epistles, after so great a train of expositors and commentators, might seem an attempt of vanity, censurable for its needlessness, did not the daily and approved examples of pious men justify it.'—*Lesson on St. Paul's Epistles.*



LONDON:

HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.

1875.

138. 2. 238.



PREFACE.

THERE is a peculiar sacredness in Family Religion. It seems to embrace the consecration of the house to God,—the hallowing of His Name within it, by the morning and evening sacrifices of prayer and praise,—whilst it brings husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, with one accord to the throne of grace, to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, to give thanks for His mercies, cast their care on Him, and supplicate those blessings of which they stand in need.

Can we doubt that such an ordinance must have a sanctifying effect on those who devoutly observe it,—that it must be the means of obtaining for them blessings both temporal and spiritual, and that to the youthful members of a family it must prove a valuable preparation for entering safely upon life.

We could wish the resolution of Joshua to be adopted by every family in the land, ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the

Lord,' and we venture to affirm that no one will ever regret having formed such a resolution, or consider the time misspent that has been devoted to family worship.

Where circumstances admit, especially where the members of a household are numerous, it is desirable that in addition to the exercise of prayer and praise, with the reading of the Scriptures, there should be some brief instruction with suitable practical application.

To provide such instruction is the object of this volume; and whilst he has abstained from giving lengthened quotations, the author has done his best to consult the most approved writers on these Epistles, and to profit by their pious and learned labours.

He now presents these 'Family Readings' to the public much in the form in which he was wont, during a long incumbency, to give expository addresses to his parishioners.

May it please God to make the perusal of this volume as instructive to the reader, as the preparation of it has been edifying and agreeable to the writer!

CHELSEA, *Easter*, 1875.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

IN the Acts of the Apostles (ch. xvii. 1-4) we read that 'when they (Paul and Silas) had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.'

Such was the planting of the Thessalonian Church, its first members consisting of a few converted Jews, and a great multitude of devout Greeks, including many women of position and influence.

These interesting converts to Christianity, had enjoyed the ministrations of St. Paul and his companion only for a short time when a storm of persecution burst upon them. This arose from the malice and envy of the unbelieving Jews, who grieved at the success which crowned the labours of these honoured missionaries, gathered together a mob of the lowest class of the people, and assaulted the house of Jason, who had received them with pious hospitality.

Having failed to find the objects of their hatred, they dragged Jason himself with certain of the Christian converts before the rulers, complaining that he had received men who were opposed to the government of Cæsar, and were preaching another King, one Jesus.

The rulers acted with characteristic timidity,

but having taken security of Jason and his companions, they dismissed the case.

The Christians, however, evidently felt that the spirit thus aroused was not to be easily quelled, and deeming it prudent to secure the safety of Paul and Silas, they sent them by night unto Berea.

Here a wide door was opened unto them, and great results followed their ministrations; but when the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica heard of their success they followed them to Berea, and were too successful in stirring up the people against them.

This rendered it necessary for St. Paul to retire from Berea, and he was conducted by certain of the brethren to Athens, where he gave his testimony in the most public and fearless manner against the idolatry of the Athenians, and called them to repentance towards God, and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whilst at Athens, the Apostle having been frustrated in his anxious desire to revisit his

friends at Thessalonica, sent Timotheus unto them to express his affectionate concern for their welfare, and to bring him tidings of them.

Having left Athens, he then came to Corinth, where he continued a year and six months, preaching the word of God among them.

Timotheus having returned from his mission, brought such tidings of the faith and love of the Thessalonian Christians, as filled the Apostle's heart with joy and thanksgiving before God.

It was under these circumstances that he wrote this epistle which bears evidence of having been addressed to a Church still in its first love,—abiding in Christ,—walking in the Spirit, and so little influenced by worldly things as to be longing for its translation to be for ever with the Lord.

The learned Bengel observes,—‘There is a kind of unmingled sweetness in this epistle, which by a reader not accustomed to the expression of sweet affections, is less relished

than the others that act upon the palate with a certain degree of harshness. The expectation of the coming of Christ among the Thesalonians was unclouded. So exalted was their condition, and so clear of impediments and incumbrances was the state of Christianity among them, that they were able hourly to look for the Lord Jesus.'

Such was their happy state; and if through human infirmity they were led into the mistake of expecting that the kingdom of God would immediately appear, there was no mistake in the evidence which their consistent piety afforded that the kingdom of God was within them.

Happy are they whose faith and practice show them to be the subjects of the kingdom of grace, for they shall assuredly be found hereafter in the kingdom of glory!

It gives additional interest to this epistle that in point of chronological order, it was probably the first of St. Paul's Epistles, having

been written by him towards the close of A.D. 52, or early in A.D. 53.

It is generally agreed that it was written from Corinth, and not from Athens as the subscription imports.

READINGS
ON
THE FIRST EPISTLE.

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READINGS ON CHAPTER I.

I.

THE OPENING SALUTATION.

CHAP. I. 1-4. — Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

WITH his usual humility, St. Paul associated Silvanus and Timotheus with himself in the

inscription of his Epistles to the Thessalonians, thus giving us an example of the love that seeketh not its own, and showing his desire to render unto all their dues.

In doing so, he had no fear of compromising himself, or of giving too prominent a place to the companions of his labours and sufferings. It was enough for him that the work was done, and he gracefully acknowledges those who had been, in any measure, instrumental in its accomplishment.

Considering the comparatively brief period which had elapsed since Europe was involved in the deepest spiritual darkness, and when St. Paul had seen in a vision the man of Macedonia saying, 'Come over and help us,' it must indeed have been a source of true thankfulness to him to be able now to address the church at Thessalonica, which was *in God the Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is church-fellowship in the best and purest sense,—the communion of saints,—the earnest and foretaste of what shall be enjoyed

in heaven. To bring us to this is the great end for which the Gospel is preached to us, and the object of those ordinances which are provided for us. We may, however, possess these means, and yet fall short of attaining the end, for 'they are not all Israel which are of Israel,' and it should therefore be a subject of careful self-examination to us whether we are indeed *in God the Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ*,—in union and fellowship with our God and Saviour, and worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

There can be no good reason why true Christians should not feel satisfied of this, and be able to say with the beloved disciple, 'we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.'

To all such, whoever they may be, St. Paul addresses his brief but affectionate apostolic exhortation, *Grace be unto you, and peace from*

God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
May such grace be abundantly bestowed upon us, and may the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep our hearts and minds.

In the firm faith and consistent practice of the Thessalonian Christians, St. Paul recognised the work of God ; for he knew well that whilst Paul may plant and Apollos water, God alone can give the increase. In this instance God had indeed given the increase, and therefore the Apostle was careful to ascribe to Him the praise. He says, *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.*

It becomes us all to cultivate this spirit,—to be ready to acknowledge the hand of God in the grace bestowed on good men, and to give thanks for the advancement of true religion under any circumstances, and through whatever instrumentality it may be accomplished.

We read, ‘whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me,’ and they who will observe the Lord’s

dealings with His people, and the blessing which rests on efforts made in simplicity and sincerity to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, will never be without subjects for holy thanksgiving and praise.

Amongst those fruits of righteousness which had appeared in the Thessalonian Christians, there were certain things which evidently afforded peculiar satisfaction to St. Paul, and which he *remembered without ceasing*. The first of these was their *work of faith*,—those works which resulted from their faith, showing at once its reality and its purifying effects. Such works no doubt included their bold confession of Christ amidst the perils to which they were exposed, their anxiety to maintain a corresponding practice, and their self-denying efforts to convey to others the glad tidings of salvation which they had themselves received with so much joy.

With the work of faith the Apostle linked their *labour of love*, which things are indeed inseparably connected; for where there is a

true faith evidenced by good works, there can hardly fail to be labours suggested by love. Such love is described as the first-fruit of the Spirit, whose blessed influences are shed abroad in the hearts of all good men; it is the love which seeketh not its own, but is long-suffering and kind, which leads men to sympathise with the sorrows, and to relieve the wants of others,—and which constrains all who have experienced its power to devote themselves, as the Thessalonian Christians did, to works of piety and charity.

The Apostle refers to another grace which was closely connected with their faith and love;—it was *their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father*. There is no true hope but that which arises from faith in Christ, and from the confident expectation of those blessings which He has promised to His people. Such hope the Thessalonians possessed, and amidst many trials they had felt its cheering influence, and were able to cherish it in patience,

as in the sight of their God and Father. We have much cause to cultivate this grace, for it is of great importance to our present happiness. It has sustained the hearts of good men amidst a great fight of afflictions, and it has often proved as 'an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast,' which has kept its possessors calm and unmoved, amidst the winds and waves of this troublesome world.

The Apostle thus recognised in the Thesalonians the three abiding graces, *faith, hope, and love*, and this afforded him the fullest evidence of *their election of God*.

We are elsewhere exhorted to give diligence to make our calling and election sure, and there is no better way of doing this than by seeking to be strong in faith, to increase and abound in love, and to cherish the hope which arises from contemplating the joy that is set before us.

The lively exercise of these graces clearly shows our connexion with that spiritual and invisible church which is in God the Father,

and in our Lord Jesus Christ; and it may safely be affirmed that all such have evidence of their election of God, and that no man who lives by faith, walks in love, and holds fast his hope, shall ever come short of attaining the crown of life.

II.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

VER. 5-7.—For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost : So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

THE faithful preaching of the Gospel is the chief means which Almighty God is pleased to employ in delivering men from the power of darkness, and translating them into the kingdom of His dear Son. It has been so from the beginning, and it will continue to

be so to the end of all things. No eloquence or learning on the part of the ministers of religion,—no attention to ordinances, however valuable in themselves,—can make up for any want of faithfulness in preaching the Gospel. It is the Gospel of Christ, and that alone, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

With what singleness of heart should the pastors of Christ's flock devote themselves to the preaching of the Gospel, never permitting the trumpet to give an uncertain sound, but taking heed that the glad tidings of redeeming love are fully and freely proclaimed, and that the message of reconciliation is delivered in all simplicity, sincerity, and truth.

And how careful should professing Christians be to listen only to the Gospel, and to turn away from the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge, for we have no right to expect the Divine blessing where the truth of the Gospel is corrupted by error, or obscured by man's devices.

The God of truth, who has given us the word of truth, and promised us the aid of the Spirit of truth, will never seal with His approval the teaching of those who are unfaithful to the glorious Gospel which is committed to their trust.

In the case of the Thessalonians, St. Paul bears witness to the blessings which had accompanied the first proclamation of the Gospel amongst them; he says, *our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*

That it might always be so should be the earnest and unceasing prayer of those who preach and of them that hear, for the excellency of the power is of God and not of us, and we should remember that the work of true religion is accomplished not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts.

In our own times, when many eloquent and learned men have been raised up to defend the truth, and when much has been written

on religious subjects with great ability, there is a disposition to preach the Gospel *in word* by those who are strangers to its *power*,—who have no love for it in their hearts,—but who find it necessary for their own popularity to give a certain measure of prominence to its leading truths. This, however, falls far short of the spirit of the faithful ministers of Christ, who feel that ‘a dispensation of the Gospel’ is committed to them, and whose hearts’ desire and prayer is so to preach that the Gospel may be received by those who hear it, *in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*

So great and blessed was the power which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel to the Thessalonians, that St. Paul could say, *Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost.*

Circumstances of affliction are not unfavourable to the reception of the Gospel, and happily the deepest trials are not inconsistent with joy in the Holy Ghost. Nay, it is often

at such times that the Gospel makes its right impression on the heart, and that men resolve to become followers of the Lord and of His people.

The affliction here specially referred to was no doubt the storm of persecution which arose on the first preaching of the Gospel at Thessalonica, which is described in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and which rendered it necessary for the Christian converts to send Paul and Silas by night unto Berea. It was thus that the strong man armed sought to keep possession of his palace, and powerful were the efforts which he made to hinder the first preaching of the Gospel, for the kingdom of darkness did not willingly give place to the kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

We are not surprised at this, and we are disposed to think that the terrible persecutions which followed each other in rapid succession during the first three centuries were less perilous to the souls of men than the mystery

of iniquity which was afterwards developed, when the profession of Christianity was combined with the most systematic efforts to corrupt Divine truth, to obscure and finally to conceal the Word of God from the people, and to substitute the form of godliness for its power.

The persecution at Thessalonica did not hinder the hearts of many from being opened to receive the Gospel, neither did it prevent those newly-made converts from becoming *ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia*. They were chosen in the furnace of affliction, and having been tried they came forth as gold.

May *our* trials produce the same sanctifying effect! Affliction in some form or other is appointed for us all, and we should not shrink from it, or think it strange when fiery trials come upon us. Our duty is to endure chastening as sons, to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and to pray that the end for which such visitations are sent, may be fully accomplished in us.

In seasons of adversity, let us also realize for our comfort, that the blessed company who are described as standing before the throne of God, and of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands, are they which came out of great tribulation, and who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Our trials will be blessed indeed, if they prove instrumental in separating us from the world, in leading us nearer to Christ, in setting our affections on things above, and in making us more and more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

III.

THE FRUITS OF THE GOSPEL.

VER. 8-10 — For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad ; so that we need not to speak any thing.

For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God ; And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

IN His Sermon on the Mount our Lord describes His people as ‘the salt of the earth,’ and ‘the light of the world,’ and

such He would have them to be at all times ; for it is through their influence, their prayers, and their constant efforts, that wickedness is to be restrained, and the world preserved from total moral corruption ; whilst it is by their pure and holy lives, combined with their faithful testimony to Divine truth, that the light of revealed religion is to be everywhere diffused.

Such is our Christian calling, and it should be our great concern to walk worthy of it, that the will of God may be accomplished in us, and that we may so live as to be ever showing forth His praise.

In the Thessalonian Christians this great end was evidently being fulfilled, for having acknowledged that they were *ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia*, the Apostle adds, *For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad.*

We learn from this that the fruits of

righteousness arising from their faith in Christ were manifest to all, and were admitted to be the effect of those new and holy principles which they had embraced. Not only so; it is here implied that they were zealously endeavouring to make known to others the glad tidings which they had themselves received, and which had filled them with all joy and peace in believing.

The situation of Thessalonica was favourable to such efforts. It was not only an important city of Macedonia, but it was connected by commerce with the ports of Asia Minor, and probably with more distant countries.

These providential circumstances were turned to good account by the Christian converts, who availed themselves of the opportunities thus afforded, for spreading abroad the knowledge of the Redeemer, and of His great salvation.

How much might be done to extend the kingdom of grace and to save immortal souls, were professing Christians always consci-

entious in using such opportunities as are providentially presented to them, for promoting the interests of religion, and communicating to others the knowledge of its saving truths.

We do not wish to ignore what has been done in this respect. We rejoice to think that through the labours of our Bible and Missionary Societies the word of life has sounded forth to the ends of the earth, and that Christian churches have arisen in some of the most dark and inhospitable regions of the globe. We thankfully acknowledge the same spirit which animated the Christians at Thessalonica, in the desire shown by many amongst ourselves to turn the commercial intercourse of our country to good account, and which has led to numerous philanthropic efforts in our seaport towns and elsewhere. We find pleasing evidence of this in the *Sailors' Homes*, *Medical Missionary Societies*, *Mission Libraries*, and kindred institutions, which afford gratifying proof of the power

of true religion, and of the constraining influence of the love of Christ.

Fully appreciating these works of faith, it is painful to reflect that much indeed remains to be done, and we earnestly beseech all who have been prospered either in temporal or spiritual concerns, to ask themselves what they can render to the Lord for all His benefits, and to consider how they can improve the talents which have been entrusted to them, for the glory of the gracious Giver, and for the benefit of their fellow-men.

So abundantly was this spirit of zeal and love displayed by the Thessalonians, that in their journeys through the neighbouring countries, St. Paul and his companions found that there was no need to speak anything respecting it, for the report had everywhere preceded them, and the testimony concerning them was clear and decided that *they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven,*

whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Such is the transforming power of the Gospel of Christ. It turns men from idols to serve the living and true God. It did so at Thessalonica, and it has done so again and again in our own times. We have heard of its blessed influence on the native Africans, and the inhabitants of Madagascar, and the South-sea Islanders, and others, in constraining them to cast away their idols and to turn to the service of the living and true God.

The greatness of the change which has thus taken place in many parts of the heathen world was strikingly expressed by a young South-sea Islander, who visited this country a few years ago.

A gentleman was kindly taking him to see some of the chief objects of interest in our metropolis, when he expressed a strong wish to be taken to the Museum of the London Missionary Society. His friendly conductor told him that the British Museum was on

a far larger scale and better worth the attention of a stranger. The young man persisted in the wish which he had expressed, and being asked for an explanation, he said that he had long cherished the desire to see the idols (some of which are in the London Missionary Society's Museum) which his darkened forefathers had worshipped, *for*, he added, *we of the Gospel-born generation have never seen an idol, and do not know what it is like.*

Let those who think that missionary labour has been in vain, ponder such a fact, and let them thankfully acknowledge that the Gospel is still as effectual as in former times, in turning men from idols to serve the living and true God.

And let us all remember that if duly influenced by the Gospel, we, who profess and call ourselves Christians, shall be turned from selfishness and worldliness, from the love of pleasure and covetousness which is idolatry, to the noblest service in which we can be

engaged, and which forms the earnest of that everlasting state where 'His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His Name shall be in their foreheads.'

And whilst the service of the living and true God separates us from the world, and constrains us to confess ourselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth, it sets before us a new and blessed object of hope, and teaches us *to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

READINGS ON CHAPTER II.


IV.

AN APPEAL TO FACTS.

CHAP. II. 1-6.—For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain; But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak: not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth the hearts.

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness; Nor of men sought we glory,



neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

HAVING spoken, with a thankful heart, of the fruits which the Gospel had produced at Thessalonica, St. Paul felt it right to advert to some of the charges which his enemies had brought against him, and to give them a practical denial. He does so by appealing to matters of fact, and to circumstances with which the Thessalonians were well acquainted.

1. They knew that his coming amongst them had not been fruitless, that *his entrance in unto them had not been in vain*, but that, on the contrary, many had received the glad tidings which he preached, and had turned from idolatry to the service of the true and living God. This was indeed good fruit, and it afforded unanswerable proof that the Divine blessing had rested on the labours of the Apostle and his companions.

There is no evidence of a work of true religion so satisfactory as this, and it is a

source of the deepest thankfulness when we are able to point to those who are 'living epistles, known and read of all men,'—to men and women who are denying ungodliness, and bringing forth in their lives the peaceable fruits of righteousness. This is the great end for which the Gospel is sent to us, and where this is granted, it has indeed borne fruit to the glory and praise of God.

2. The Thessalonians were also aware that the circumstances under which St. Paul had visited their city, were neither attractive nor encouraging. He and his fellow-labourer had been *shamefully entreated at Philippi*, treated with indignities which were at once unmerited, and contrary to law; but this did not hinder them from coming to Thessalonica and exposing themselves to similar danger, for trusting wholly in God, they were bold to speak unto them the Gospel of God, in the midst of much contention.

Could his enemies, then, charge him with any selfish or interested motive in having

come to Theſſalonica? Not indeed with truth; but nevertheless they did ſo, ſhowing thereby the enmity of the carnal mind againſt God, and againſt thoſe who are engaged in His ſervice.

It is ſtriking to notice how this ſame ſpirit has aſſailed and ſought to vilify ſome of the moſt devoted miſſionaries of modern times. Amongſt men of the world it is but too common to hear unworthy motives attributed to thoſe who have gone forth to preach the Goſpel; but they have failed to prove that anything but love to Chriſt, and compaſſion to the ſouls of men, has taken men to Greenland and Labrador—to Western Africa, which has been well deſcribed as ‘the white man’s grave,’—or to Madagascar, the ſcene of the moſt terrible perſecution which has occurred in modern times; and however men may affect to deſpiſe ſuch labours, they have been abundantly owned and bleſt by Almighty God, for already it may be affirmed, that in many places, the wilderneſs and the ſolitary place have been made

glad, and that the desert has begun to rejoice and blossom like the rose.

3. The moral purity of the doctrine which he had taught was another fact to which St. Paul appealed, for he could truly say that his teaching was *not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile*. No, it was the opposite of these. It was a constant testimony against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and a persuasion to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world; and whilst he taught that we are saved by grace alone, through faith, and that not of ourselves, but the gift of God, he never failed to exhort His hearers to 'follow holiness, without which no men can see the Lord.'

This forms one of the strongest internal evidences to the truth of Christianity; for whilst it reveals a way of salvation, which is by grace alone, irrespective of human merit, it makes no compromise whatever with sin, but imperatively requires the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

It was this pure Christian morality which St. Paul had taught, regardless of the enmity which such teaching must arouse in the hearts of sensual and ungodly men, feeling that he was accountable to God alone, which trieth our hearts, who had been pleased to entrust him with a dispensation of the Gospel; and whom alone he desired to please.

This spirit should always distinguish the ministers of religion. If they faithfully testify against sin, they must expect to experience the opposition of those who are living in sin, but 'their judgment is with the Lord, and their work is with their God;' and it should be enough for them to have the testimony of a good conscience that they are seeking to do His will, and to deliver, with all fidelity, the message which has been entrusted to them.

4. St. Paul could further affirm that he had never had recourse to *flattery*, and *God was witness* that he had not used his teaching as *a cloke of covetousness* to further his own selfish ends, or to ingratiate himself in their favour.

No ; he sought not glory of men, neither did he and his fellow-labourers avail themselves of those temporal advantages, to which they were justly entitled, by being *burdensome to them as the apostles of Christ*.

We are forcibly reminded by St. Paul's experience, and by the appeal which he felt it right to make in his own defence, of the many warnings which our blessed Lord gave to His disciples on this subject.

'Behold,' said He, 'I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves ;' and again, 'The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. If they have persecuted Me they will also persecute you ; if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household ?'

To such warnings He added the greatest possible encouragement for His people in these circumstances, when He said, 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute

you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. '

We cannot, then, feel surprised that the Apostles and their fellow-labourers were assailed with calumny and unmerited reproach, or that they found, everywhere, that bonds and afflictions were abiding them.

Nor has the offence of the cross ceased with the apostolic age ; for the like spirit has again and again been displayed with unmitigated violence.

Thus, our venerable Reformers were constantly assailed by the strife of tongues, false accusations, and persecutions, for their works' sake. The same experience awaited those great and good men who were the chief instruments in the revival of religion in the eighteenth century. Wesley and Whitfield,*

* See Cowper's striking defence of Whitfield in his poem 'Hope.'

Venn and Simeon, and many others, had much opposition to encounter, and unmerited reproach to bear. Indeed it may be affirmed, with truth, that the introduction of pure religion into any neighbourhood has generally been met in this way, indicating, no doubt, the determination of the strong man armed to keep his goods in peace.

We should not then think it strange if we find ourselves misrepresented, and our good evil spoken of, but place our trust in the Lord, and commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well-doing, being fully assured that in His own time and way, He will bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our just dealing as the noon-day.

Happy are they who, in such circumstances, can appeal to facts, as St. Paul did, and who have the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity they have had their conversation in the world.

V.

THE SPIRIT OF AN APOSTOLIC MINISTRY.

VER. 7-12.—But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children : So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail : for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves among you that believe : As ye know how we exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory.

HAVING thus cleared himself from those charges which the enemies of the cross of

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Christ had brought against him, and having given unanswerable proof that his motives in visiting Thessalonica had been pure and disinterested, St. Paul appeals to the members of the Thessalonian church, as to the spirit and manner of his ministrations amongst them.

In doing this, he unfolds to us the spirit of a truly apostolic ministry, which is very precious in itself, whilst it forms a striking contrast to that harsh and domineering tone which has frequently been assumed by those who lay claim to apostolic authority and power.

I. The first impression which we receive from these verses is the spirit of love in which the Apostles executed their high and holy office. We have here no assumption of absolute authority—no threats of excommunication—but a spirit quite the opposite. *We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.*

The word thus translated * means simply a

* *Τεσφης*.

nurse, but may with great propriety be employed to describe a nursing-mother, and was probably used by St. Paul in this sense, which conveys to us a forcible idea of the watchful care which he exercised over them; the forbearance which he manifested towards them; and the tenderness of his dealings with them.

Nay, so ardent was his affection for them, that he was willing, not only to preach the Gospel to them, but to expose himself to personal danger for their sakes, and even, if need be, *to lay down his life for them, because they were dear unto him.*

The spirit of love is the first thing necessary for the Christian ministry, and the pivot on which everything connected with it must turn. Other gifts and graces are of great importance in their place, but nothing will compensate for the absence of love—love to Christ, and love to the souls of men. It is this which has distinguished every fruitful ministry, and which has constrained those

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who were influenced by it, to the most unwearied efforts to promote the best interests of their fellow-creatures.

The Lord grant to His Church in these last days a baptism of love, and raise up for the Ministry of the Gospel, both at home and abroad, men having a single eye to the promotion of His glory, the edification of His people, and the salvation of souls.

II. We are also here reminded that the ministry of the Apostles was distinguished by a spirit of self-denial. They did not forget the words of their Divine Master, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'* They did so; they acted literally as they were commanded; and they had done so at Thessalonica. They had an unquestionable right to live by the Gospel, and to be burdensome, if they pleased, as the Apostles of Christ; but very different had been their conduct, as we gather from these words: *Ye remember,*

* Matt. xvi. 24.

brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day that we might not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God.

This was self-denial indeed; nor was it only in this instance that St. Paul had acted thus, for when he bade farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church, we find him saying, 'I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.' *

Such is the spirit of a truly apostolic ministry; and it should distinguish the ministers of religion at all times; for whilst the labourer is worthy of his hire, and it is unquestionably right that proper and becoming provision be made for those who devote themselves to the work of the ministry, it should, at the same time, be their constant care to manifest to all men a disinterested and self-denying spirit. That an opposite spirit has too widely pre-

* *Acts, xx. 38, 34.*

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vailed cannot be denied, and it calls for deep humiliation, for it has done much injury to the cause of true religion; and many are the stumbling-blocks which have been created by those who have made preferment their chief end, and who have enriched themselves and their families from funds which were consecrated to the service of God, and intended to promote the highest and holiest ends.

We must not forget, however, that numerous instances of apostolical self-denial can be adduced, and that our own Church in particular has benefited to a large extent by those who have undertaken the charge of populous and needy parishes without fee or reward, or who have otherwise freely devoted their time, their talents, and their substance to the cause of Christ.

We have seen a memorable instance of this in one who has but recently passed away from us. The Rev. Henry Venn discharged the onerous and anxious duties of chief secretary to the Church Missionary Society for more

than thirty years without any pecuniary remuneration whatever. It is gratifying to recall such cases, and so doing, not to glory in the men, but to glorify God in them.

III. The ministry of the Apostles was also characterized by a spirit of holiness. They could say with truth, *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.* They had proved themselves to be *holy* in every thing connected with the service of God, *just* in their dealings with their fellow-men, and *blameless* in all respects, so that their conduct could bring no reproach on the service in which they were engaged.

The spirit of holiness should ever distinguish all true Christians, for they are called with an holy calling; their God is a holy God; He has said, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy;' and the way in which He leads them is emphatically 'the way of holiness.'

It should be specially so, however, with the *ministers* of religion, for they must 'be clean

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who bear the vessels of the Lord's house ;' and if they are to discharge their duties to the glory of God, and to the benefit of their fellow-men, it can only be through the blessed influences of the Spirit of holiness.

On this point there is no room for difference of opinion, for whilst the most sincere ministers of Christ may be unable to see eye to eye on many subjects of importance, they must all be united in this—in following holiness, without which no man, be he minister or private Christian, shall see the Lord. They should seek, moreover, so to live, and so to minister, as to be able at all times to appeal to their flocks *how holily, and justly, and unblameably* they have behaved themselves among them.

IV. These honoured servants could also say, *Ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory.*

Here was faithfulness manifested in a spirit of true paternal love. They pointed to the hope set before them, to the kingdom which is to come, to the glory which shall hereafter be revealed, and they exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of them to walk worthy of God, who had called them, by the Gospel of His grace, to be the inheritors of His everlasting kingdom.

This is strikingly expressive of the great end of pastoral ministrations, for it shows us that whilst the ministers of religion are to be 'testifying unto all men repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,' • they are to be building up the people of God on their most holy faith, exhorting and comforting, and charging all who have believed, to keep before them the great object of their hope, and to take heed that their walk and conversation be worthy of it.

The Lord grant to His holy Church throughout all the world such a ministry in these eventful times! May His faithful servants

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everywhere be endowed with the spirit of love, the spirit of self-denial, the spirit of holiness, and the spirit of faithfulness! May He be pleased to add greatly to their number, and give to those 'which shall be ordained to any holy function such grace and heavenly benediction that they may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth His glory, and set forward the salvation of all men, through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

VI.

THANKFULNESS FOR GRACE BESTOWED.

VER. 13-16.—For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

THE Apostles seem to have kept continually before them the command which they had

received from their Lord. 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.' Preaching was their special work, they ceased not to preach and to teach Jesus Christ. Very different, however, were the effects of their teaching, for by some it was received gladly, but of others we are told that the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. To the one the preaching of the word was the savour of life unto life, but to the other it was the savour of death unto death.

In reviewing his labours at Thessalonica, St. Paul expresses his thankfulness for the way in which his testimony had been received in that city; he says, *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

This was receiving the truth in the love

of it, and to the saving of their own souls, for they received it not as the word of men, but as the word of God. This is the grand secret of hearing the word with profit; we must realize its divine origin, as given by inspiration of God, and as intended to be preached by His faithful servants at all times, in humble dependence on the accompanying grace of the Holy Spirit; for it is as true now as it was in the apostolic age that 'it is the Spirit that quickeneth.'

And let both preachers and hearers remember that it is the word of God, and that alone, *which effectually worketh in them that believe*; for no philosophical disquisitions, no moral essays, however excellent in themselves, no display of pulpit oratory can produce this effect. It is the word of God alone, which, accompanied by the gracious teaching of the Spirit, effectually worketh to the conversion of the soul, to the renewal of the will, and to the preparation of those who believe for the kingdom of heaven.

Oh, that all who have enjoyed the privilege of hearing the word would examine themselves whether they have rightly received it, and whether it is working in them the great end for which it is sent.

In the case of the Thessalonians it was truly so, and the sincerity of their profession was soon subjected to a severe test by the fiery trial which awaited them, for *they became followers of the churches of God which in Judea were in Christ Jesus, having suffered many things of their own countrymen, even as they had of the Jews.*

We learn from the Acts of the Apostles and from the Epistle to the Hebrews, how great were the persecutions which the Hebrew converts to Christianity had to bear from the unbelieving Jews, and not only so, but that these were the instigators of the first Gentile persecutions.

It was so at Thessalonica, for we read (Acts, xvii.) that 'the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, set all the city in an

uproar,' and that 'they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying that these men which have turned the world upside down have come hither also.'

The same thing occurred at Berea and at Iconium, where (Acts, xiv. 2) 'the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.' An eminent writer observes that the undesigned coincidence between the statement of this Epistle and the history given in the Acts, affords a strong proof of the genuineness of both, and he adds that 'it was the Jews always who set on foot the persecutions against the Apostles and their followers.'*

A persecuting spirit may be regarded as a mark of apostasy, whether under the Jewish or Christian dispensations, and it has too often distinguished those who have put forth exclusive pretensions to their being the people of God. The Jews had prided themselves much on this, but so far from their giving evidence

* Paley's '*Horæ Paulinæ*,' in loc.

of being in the counsel of the Most High, they despised and rejected His only-begotten Son,—they demanded that He might be crucified,—*they killed the Lord Jesus*,—killed the Prince of life, and desired a murderer to be granted to them.

Oh, unhappy people! what woes have they brought upon themselves!—what vials of Divine wrath have been poured out upon them!—what tribulation and anguish have they experienced during eighteen centuries, in retribution for the enormous crime of killing the Holy One and the Just!

But the spirit which thus culminated in the crucifixion of their Lord, had often shown itself in the treatment which their own holy prophets had received at their hands. They had indeed persecuted the prophets which were before Him. One of our venerable Reformers, commenting on this subject, says, ‘Isaiah the prophet was cut in sunder with a saw. What more cruel death? His body was rent, his bowels torn, and yet he was not

quite dead. Why? what had he done? *He was a prophet.* Jeremy was stoned to death. Wherefore? Because he called the people to repentance that they might be saved. *He was a prophet.* Amos was slain with a bar, poor old man! no reverence given to his grey head. Wherefore? Because he rebuked iniquity,—*because he was a prophet.* Zacharias was slain when he was in his prayers, and doing sacrifice in the holy place, between the entrance and the altar. Wherefore? Because he declared the truth,—*because he was a prophet.*

‘This,’ he adds, ‘hath been the malice and hatred of the devil. The prince of the darkness of this world hath raged so, even from the beginning. By this means he hath sought to deface the truth and glory of God, and to establish his own kingdom in shedding the blood and murdering the saints of God.’*

And now the Jews were manifesting the same spirit by persecuting the Apostles and their followers, showing a state of mind which

* Bishop Jewel on ‘Thessalonians.’

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was displeasing to God, whilst it indicated the absence of all kindness and compassion towards their fellow-men.

One thing more especially seems to have aroused their indignation against St. Paul. It was his *preaching to the Gentiles*, and telling them that the 'middle-wall of partition' between Jew and Gentile existed no longer, but that God now commanded all men everywhere to repent, and invited all to become His people by faith in Christ Jesus.

There was only one way in which they would deign to speak to the Gentiles, which was to invite them to become proselytes to Judaism, by submitting to the Mosaic ordinances and ritual; whilst St. Paul, on the contrary, taught that this was unnecessary, and that the Gentiles were as freely invited as the Jews to become partakers of the blessings of the Gospel.

The Apostle must have touched on this subject with very peculiar feelings. He doubtless remembered the past,—the time

when Saul of Tarsus persecuted the Church, thinking that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,—but it had pleased God to open his eyes, and to make him a preacher of the faith which he had once laboured to destroy; and now he saw that his intolerant and unhappy countrymen were filling up the measure of their sins by so obstinately persisting in unbelief and opposition to the Gospel, as to show, but too plainly, that the wrath, of which they had been so often warned, was come upon them to the uttermost.

We are thus reminded that a persecuting spirit is wholly opposed to true religion, and that nothing whatever can justify it. There are dark spots on the escutcheon of Rome arising from this source which constrain us to identify her with the woman described in the Apocalypse, as drunken with the blood of saints and of the martyrs of Jesus Christ; but, unhappily, the spirit of persecution has not been confined to Rome, but

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wherever it has existed, it is wrong, and contrary to the will of Him who came not to destroy men's lives but to save them.

The law of Christ is clearly defined, and it is this, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'

VII.

PRESENT HINDRANCES.

VER. 17-20.—But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

For ye are our glory and joy.

THE circumstances under which St. Paul had retired from Thessalonica are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles,* where we learn that the persecution raised against him by the un-

* Chap. xvii.

- believing Jews was so violent, that the Christian converts felt it right to send away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea.

This was an unwelcome interruption to his labours, but he evidently hoped that it would be of short duration, and that he would soon have the satisfaction to revisit Thessalonica, and resume his superintendence of the Church which he had recently planted there. He had indeed been rudely separated from them, but though he was absent from them, *it was in presence, not in heart*, and he cherished the ardent desire of soon seeing them again.

In this he was doomed to repeated and trying disappointments, for although he had more than once resolved to return to Thessalonica, he was prevented from doing so. What the obstacles were we are not informed, but he plainly indicates the source from whence they had proceeded; for, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says, *We should have come to you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us.*

We are thus reminded that our spiritual adversary is mysteriously permitted to exercise much power in this sinful world, and that it is his unceasing aim to hinder the progress of true religion, and to thwart and defeat the plans and purposes of those who labour to extend the Redeemer's kingdom.

The devil lays claim to nothing less than the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, and although he knows that the seed of the woman, who has already bruised the serpent's head, is Lord of all, and that in due season the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and that He shall reign for ever and ever, yet is he determined to give up only through a mighty struggle, which Satan and his angels will continue to maintain till their final overthrow in the battle of the great day of God Almighty.

Our blessed Lord ascribes the trials of His people to the same source, when in His message to the angel of the Church in Smyrna, He

says, 'Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried.' In this case, as in the hindrances referred to by St. Paul, the agents were no doubt wicked men, but their instigator was the devil, and our Lord attributes the act directly to him.

There can be no doubt that the same thing is still going on, and that we have a vigilant and active enemy to contend against, whose unceasing aim is to hinder the progress of true religion. Many of us have had practical experience of this; for what hindrances have we seen placed in the way of those who would otherwise have heard the faithful preaching of the word,—what obstacles to personal intercourse with others who were anxious to receive instruction, — what prejudices created, and what misrepresentations circulated respecting those who were Christ's faithful soldiers and servants!

Nay, more than this, what active and able efforts have we seen to disseminate error,—to circulate infidel, popish, and demoralizing publi-

cations ! Call this what you will, it is simply the work of the devil ; for whilst ungodly men allow themselves to be his tools, the dark and unhallowed work is his own.

The same thing has been remarkably displayed in the opposition shown to missionary labours in heathen lands. What grave and plausible reasons have we heard urged against such efforts,—what contempt for the agents employed (many of them men of whom the world was not worthy), and what misrepresentations from those who profess to have visited the field of their self-denying labours ! We have no difficulty in tracing all these things to their true source, and ascribing them simply to the wicked one. Our comfort is that He who is for us is greater far than all who are against us, and that the God of peace has promised to bruise Satan under our feet shortly. Meanwhile, we are not ignorant of his devices, and let us not think it strange when such hindrances arise. It always has been so, and it will continue to be so till

the Church militant becomes the Church triumphant, and the kingdom of grace is consummated in the kingdom of glory.

Although thus separated for a season from his friends in Thessalonica, St. Paul cherishes towards them feelings of ardent affection, and thankful to the God of all grace who had made him the honoured instrument in their conversion to Christ, he looked forward to the day when they should be presented to the Lord at His appearing; *For what, he asks, is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

We have here, almost incidentally, the confirmation of two important truths. The first is that we shall recognise each other in the world to come, for it is impossible to understand how the Christians at Thessalonica could be a source of glory and joy to St. Paul hereafter if he was not to recognise them, and if they were to be unable to recognise him.

The fact being here and elsewhere clearly taught us, it is not for us to ask how it can be, but we should remember that He who conferred upon the early Christians the power of *discerning spirits*, and other miraculous gifts, can have no difficulty in imparting to the human mind, in its glorified state, the power of recognising those with whom it has been associated in this present life.

There seems reason to believe that every faculty of the mind will hereafter be enjoyed with a fulness and perfection of which we can at present form no adequate idea.

Another truth which is here clearly implied is *the reward of grace*, for St. Paul evidently expected that the salvation of the Thessalonian Christians would add to his own happiness hereafter, and be to him a source of glory and joy.

This wise master-builder was indeed careful to impress upon us that 'other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,'—that salvation is 'by grace alone

through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God,'—but whilst thus exposing every false ground of confidence and testifying that all is of grace, 'not of works lest any man should boast,' he at the same time taught that there will be an apportionment of future reward to present devotedness, and that every work of faith and labour of love shall be remembered hereafter.

The same delightful truth is presented to us in many passages of Scripture, where we are assured that 'every man shall receive his own reward,'* and are exhorted to 'look to ourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.'†

* 1 Cor. iii. 8.

† 2 John, 8.

READINGS ON CHAPTER III.

VIII.

THE MISSION OF TIMOTHEUS.

CHAP. III. 1-5.—Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone ; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith : That no man should be moved by these afflictions : for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation ; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

In the preceding chapter, St. Paul had expressed the strong desire which he felt to

pay a personal visit to the Christians at Thessalonica, and he had told them that he was prevented from doing so by a series of hindrances which he ascribed to Satanic influence. His anxiety on their account had, however, been so great, that although it was very inconvenient to himself, he determined to be left at Athens alone, and to send Timotheus unto them.

We have frequent mention of this faithful and devoted man in St. Paul's epistles, and many proofs of the value which the Apostle attached to his character and to his co-operation. He here describes him as *our brother and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the Gospel of Christ*. He elsewhere speaks of him as 'my own son in the faith,' 'my beloved son,' 'my dearly beloved son,' from which expressions we conclude that he was among the fruits of the Apostle's ministry, which must have added greatly to his satisfaction to have such a fellow-labourer, and one in whom he could confide on an occasion like the present.

The purpose which St. Paul contemplated in the mission of Timothy was not only that he might bring him tidings respecting them, but *establish them and comfort them concerning their faith.*

We are thus reminded that those who have already sincerely embraced the Gospel need to be confirmed, or established in the faith. We are not only to receive Christ Jesus the Lord, but to walk in Him; we are not only to be rooted, but built up in Him; we are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Hence the importance of watchfulness against any measure of declension, and of diligently using all those means which are conducive to our spiritual improvement.

Let no one say that because he sincerely believes, there is no need of his faith being strengthened and increased, for we all need this, and so long as we continue here, the direction given to us is, to be 'building up ourselves on our most holy faith.'

There are also many circumstances in which true Christians require to be *comforted concerning their faith*. Outward things often seem to be against them, some who once appeared to run well are hindered, and through abounding iniquity, the love of others has waxed cold. These things are trying and depressing, but our God is the God of all comfort, and He who said to His prophet of old, ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,’ would still have His ministers to be engaged in the same blessed work of comforting those who are in any trouble.

As a reason why none should allow themselves to be moved by outward afflictions and persecutions, the Apostle testifies that *we are appointed thereunto*, that this is the furnace through which God’s people must pass, the fiery trial which is to try them.

He also reminds the Thessalonians that he had warned them of approaching trials. *For verily*, he says, *when we were with you we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*

They ought, therefore, to have been prepared for the trials which had come upon them; and so should we, for there is no exemption from trial promised to any of the people of God. This world is not our rest, and it is often by sorrow and chastening that the Lord reminds us of the fact, and teaches us that we are strangers and pilgrims here.

If any of us are permitted to enjoy circumstances of comparative ease and tranquillity, we should regard this as exceptional, and whilst thankful for so great a boon, we should be ready to suffer tribulation, if it be God's will to appoint it for us.

The tribulation, which he anticipated, having come upon the Thessalonians, the Apostle was anxious to know that they had been able to stand in the evil day, and he therefore sent unto them both for his own sake and for theirs, fearing *lest by some means the tempter had tempted them, and his labour had been in vain.*

He thus showed himself to be a man of like passions with ourselves, subject to the same anxieties and fears; and although he was favoured with abundant revelations, when His Divine Master saw such communications to be necessary, he had no preternatural means of ascertaining the state of the Thessalonians, but had to despatch a messenger to them in the ordinary way.

The verses which we have been considering convey to us certain very important lessons.

I. We are here taught that the sovereignty of God, and the certainty that His purpose shall stand, does not in any degree set aside human responsibility, or render watchfulness and prayer unnecessary in the people of God. In the first chapter of this epistle, St. Paul had described the Church of the Thessalonians as being *in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ*, and he had expressed his confidence in their *election of God*; but this did not prevent him from feeling anxious on their account, or from being afraid *lest by some*

means the tempter had tempted them, and his labour had been in vain.

It is of great importance to weigh such statements, for the truths of revealed religion are vast and comprehensive, whilst our mental powers are, at best, but limited; and hence the tendency to give undue preponderance to some particular portion of Divine truth.

The sovereignty of God, and the fact of an election unto eternal life, are unquestionably revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, but so is the love of God, with the freeness and fulness of the salvation provided for us, and the assurance that He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

There can be no real contradiction between these great truths, and if we are unable at present to perceive their connecting links, we must wait for the time when we shall see no more as through a glass darkly, but face to face; when we, who now know in part, shall know even as also we are known.

II. We are further reminded by these verses that it is always our duty to persevere in the use of means, and that we cannot expect the Divine blessing if we neglect them. We have no right to say that if such things are in harmony with the Divine purpose they will be brought to pass though we remain inactive; and still more unbecoming is it to argue that if certain persons are to be saved, they will be saved, or if they are to be lost, they will be lost.

It was not thus that St. Paul acted towards the Thessalonians when he sent Timotheus unto them *to establish them and to comfort them concerning their faith*; nor did his belief in *their election of God* prevent him from feeling anxious, lest any temptation had overcome them, and his labour had been in vain.

Let us realize our own insignificance, and the greatness of Him who has said that 'as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Let us

remember also that whilst 'secret things belong unto the Lord our God, those which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever.' And blessed be His Name, He has revealed to us the fulness of His love, the freeness of His grace, and the ordinances in which He will meet with us and bless us; He has also given us great and precious promises whereby He would draw us to Himself and raise us to the enjoyment of eternal life.

IX.

GOOD TIDINGS RECEIVED.

VER. 6-10.—But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you : Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith : For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God ; Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith ?

THE wise man says, ‘ As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.’

There are many who can bear witness to the truth of that saying—the anxious parent; the dutiful son or daughter; the faithful friend—have all felt the invigorating and cheering influence of good news from a far country.

It has often dispelled the most gloomy fears, relieved weakness of faith, and given strength for present duties.

Such appears to have been St. Paul's experience on the return of Timotheus from Thessalonica, for he found that his fears had been groundless, and that God's grace had proved sufficient (as it ever does) for his beloved friends in that city.

Timotheus had brought him good tidings of *their faith and love*, for the most bitter persecution had neither shaken their faith, nor caused their love to wax cold, but had rather tended to strengthen and confirm these graces. Such is the right effect of trial—nay, the end for which it is sent; and it is a cause of unspeakable thankfulness when it

is followed by such results. St. James says, 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him;' and we shall do well to remember this so long as we are in the body. There is no promise of exemption from trial whilst we are here, but whether our trials come from persecution, or from allurements to sin, *they* are indeed blessed who endure, for 'if we suffer with Him we shall reign with Him,' and trial endured with faith and patience is the sure and certain preparation for the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.

Timotheus had been able also to assure the Apostle of the unaltered feelings of affection which the Thessalonians entertained towards him—that they had a good remembrance of him, desiring greatly to see him, even as he had been anxious to see them.

Tidings so gratifying as these produced the happiest effect on the mind of St. Paul, and

made him forget his own trials in the comfort which it gave him concerning them, *Therefore, brethren, says he, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith : for, now we live if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

Not only so ; these good news sent him to the throne of grace, with the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, although he felt that such acknowledgment of the Divine goodness came far short of what the occasion required, for in the fulness of a grateful heart he says, *What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God ?*


An old writer says, ‘ When we are most cheerful, we should be most thankful ; what we rejoice in, we should give thanks for.’ St. Paul did so ; he rejoiced in the good tidings of his friends at Thessalonica, and he hastened to give most humble and hearty thanks to Almighty God, the Author and Giver of all good things.

We shall do well to follow his example, for

‘whoso offereth praise glorifieth God,’ and when good tidings dispel our fears, revive our spirits, and make us joyful, it is meet and right that we should thankfully acknowledge Him who has dealt so bountifully with us.

With thanksgiving for past mercies, St. Paul continued to mingle the most fervent supplications, that, if it were consistent with the Divine will, he might be permitted in due time *to see their face and to perfect that which was lacking in their faith*, for he doubtless hoped through his personal ministrations to assist them in arriving at ‘the perfect man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’

The joy which St. Paul experienced on this occasion is worthy of our attentive consideration. It was a purely spiritual affection, nay, it was ‘a joy with which the stranger doth not intermeddle,’ for the world cannot in any measure sympathize with it. It is part of that secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him, for every true Christian has



felt it, and amidst many trials has tasted the happiness which it is capable of imparting. If we possess the love that seeketh not its own, such joy will arise in our hearts whenever we hear of the steadfast faith, the increasing love, and abundant fruitfulness of good men.

St. John says, 'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth ;' * and if we are animated by the same spirit we shall be ever ready to rejoice when we hear of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, walking consistently in the truth.

It is one of the benefits arising from reading select biography, that it enables us to do this. We find there the experience of good men, who have been strengthened in weakness, comforted in sorrow, and rendered fruitful in good works, and it should fill our hearts with gratitude and praise, to see what Divine grace has done for such men ; how out of weakness they were made strong, enabled to endure a

* 3 John, 4.

great fight of afflictions, and so to confess Christ before men as to be instrumental in turning many unto righteousness.

Similar feelings should arise in our hearts on hearing of the conversion of souls, whether at home or abroad, for if 'there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth,' the true servants of God cannot fail to rejoice over any of their fellow-creatures who are forsaking the error of their ways, and returning to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

The annals of the primitive Church record many instances of this feeling. When Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to ascertain the truth of the Grecians believing and turning to the Lord, we are told that when he saw the grace of God, '*he was glad,* and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord, for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'*

* Acts, xi. 23, 24.

Barnabas passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, we read that '*they caused great joy unto all the brethren.*' *

Such are the feelings which true Christians must experience on hearing of the conversion of souls; they cannot but rejoice, and their joy is not a sentimental or evanescent feeling, but that deep and pure emotion which raising the mind to the source of all spiritual blessings will cause much thanksgiving to redound to the glory of God.

* Acts, xv. 3.

X.

AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER.

VER. 11-13.—Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

WE read in the book of Proverbs that ‘a man’s heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.’ It is not wrong for a man to devise his way,—to make plans for the future, and to cherish the hope that he

may see the accomplishment of his desires, provided that all this is done with submission to the will of God.

In many instances the Lord is pleased to prosper the well-considered and wisely-projected plans of His people, but in other instances the failure of such plans is an appointed trial, whilst the way of His servants is hedged in, and their hopes of extensive usefulness are mysteriously disappointed.

Whatever the issue may be, it is good to commit our way to the Lord, to cherish a spirit of submission to His will, and to ask that we may hear a word behind us saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.'

In this spirit St. Paul acted. He desired greatly to revisit Thessalonica, to see his beloved friends in that city once more, and by his personal ministrations to perfect that which was lacking in their faith. Having assured them that this was the subject of

his constant and fervent supplications, he breathes forth this pious and submissive ejaculation, *Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*

So far as we know, he was not permitted to accomplish this desire, but it was well that it was in his heart, and the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls was able to watch over the Thessalonian Christians, and to provide abundantly for their spiritual wants.

To *His* care and blessing he commended them in the words of this truly apostolic prayer, *The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you : to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

How precious are the prayers of saints, and especially those which were immediately

inspired by the Spirit of grace and of supplication !

I. The first blessing asked for in this prayer was an increase of love.


The importance of this grace seems to have been ever present to the mind of the Apostle, as distinctive of true religion,—the first-fruit of the Spirit,—the highest and best of gifts. In his prayer for the Philip-pians he asks that the Lord would make them *to increase and abound in love*, and he here seeks a like blessing for the Thessaloni-ans. He says, *The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you.*

The first of these petitions is for brotherly love, *love one toward another*, the love which forms the subject of our Lord's new com-mandment when He said, 'A new command-ment give I unto you, that ye love one another ; as I have loved you that ye also love one another.' He not only said so, but

He constituted this a mark of true discipleship, for He added, 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one toward another.'

The exercise of this grace is, therefore, of paramount importance, for the mutual edification and happiness of His people, and for the advancement of His kingdom. On this point St. John reminds us that the will of God is clearly revealed, when he says, 'This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.'

We have much cause then to adopt this petition, and to pray without ceasing for an increase of brotherly love; for nothing can justify the neglect of this grace, whilst it is evident that Satan gains great advantage by the want of unity amongst professing Christians,—their unnecessary strifes and divisions, and the absence of that love which should ever prove the best and most sacred connecting link amongst the followers of Christ.



But this grace is not to be limited to the people of God, it is to be extended toward all men. The Apostle's prayer is, 'The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, *and toward all men, even as we do toward you.*'

The love of sympathy can indeed only be exercised amongst the people of God, but there is a love of kindness and benevolence which is to be extended toward all. It is the desire to do men good, to convince them of their spiritual wants, and to relieve their temporal necessities. It is a ray reflected from *His* glory who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and who sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Love to God, love to His people simply for His sake, and love toward all men, shown by acts of kindness and compassion, are the fruits of the Spirit, whose blessed influences are shed abroad in the hearts of good men, and by whom they are sealed unto the day of redemption.

The Lord grant that we and His people

everywhere may increase and abound in this heavenly grace more and more.

II. The prayer of the Apostle further intimates that there is a close connexion between increasing love and advancement in holiness, for he adds, *To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.* The expression here used is remarkable, and seems to refer not only to growth in personal holiness, without which no man can see the Lord, but to the consciousness of possessing such holiness,—the testimony of a good conscience that the desire of our hearts is to be holy.

On this subject an able writer says, ‘I understand these words to imply, on the part of God’s children, *a consciousness to themselves of their being holy and unblameable; or in other words, they point not only to the condition of their holiness, but to their consciousness of that condition.*’*

* *The Rev. C. J. Goodhart in loc.*

Whilst cherishing the deepest humility, and acknowledging ourselves to be but unprofitable servants, it should be our earnest desire and prayer to attain to this state of mind ; and it becomes us to examine ourselves whether we are consistently following holiness,—denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,—exercising ourselves to have a good conscience toward God and toward men, and carefully avoiding everything that might grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

It is when faith manifests itself in such unwearied efforts to be conformed to the will of God, that our hearts are more and more established unblameable in holiness, for ‘if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things ; but if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God ;’ and such is the happy frame of mind in which the Apostle would have us to be found *at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

This implies no change whatever in our

ground of confidence before God, for the best and holiest shall be saved in the day of the Lord, 'by grace alone through faith;' but it does imply that holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, and building on that great foundation which God has laid in Zion, we may so grow in grace and increase and abound in love, as to have our hearts established unblameable in holiness before God, in the great day when Christ who is our life shall appear, and when we also shall appear with Him in glory.

The Lord seal us with the Holy Spirit of promise,—grant us now the earnest and foretaste of this state of mind, and teach us so to 'abide in Him, that when He shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming!'

READINGS ON CHAPTER IV.

XI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

CHAP. IV. 1, 2.—Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more.

For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

WE are elsewhere told that ‘the path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.’

It is so ; but of those who profess to run the Christian race, how few attain to this ! Some

are entangled again with the world, others are blighted through the deceitfulness of sin, whilst not a few, who seemed to be earnest and sincere, are turned aside by the delusive influence of religious error.

We may indeed say with St. James, 'Behold we count them happy which endure,' and throughout the inspired Epistles we find many evidences of the anxiety which the Apostles felt on this subject. They not only sought that the early Christians should be 'rooted and built up in Christ,' but that they should adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things.

This is strongly expressed in the passage before us, where St. Paul says with so much earnestness, *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.*

I. These words clearly imply that the

Apostle had already carefully instructed them in the duties of the Christian life, for he reminds them that he had taught them *how they ought to walk and to please God*, and he adds, *Ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.*

That St. Paul taught that we are saved by grace alone, through faith, no one who is acquainted with his epistles can deny. When he said to the Philippian jailor, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,’ he enunciated a great truth which is confirmed and illustrated by all his subsequent teaching; but he also taught that the faith which saves the soul must constrain its possessor to a life of holy obedience to the will of God, and that ‘we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’

This is strikingly expressed in the exhortations which he addressed to those young ministers, in whose welfare he took so lively

an interest. To Timothy he says, 'O man of God, flee these things,'—the sins to which he had been referring—'and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.' To Titus he writes, 'In all things show thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity; sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you;' and with apostolic authority and power he adds, 'This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.'

Such was the teaching of this holy man,—this faithful servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. In his estimation, everything connected with the practice of virtue and the progress of the Christian life, was of paramount importance; and everywhere, in all churches of the saints, he taught *how men ought to walk and please God*, and for this

end *he gave them commandments by the Lord Jesus.*

II. Having thus reminded the Thessalonians of the instructions which he had formerly given them for the regulation of their practice, St. Paul impresses on them the importance of continual progress; he beseeches and exhorts them, by the Lord Jesus, that *they would abound more and more.*

He evidently feared their declension from primitive piety, and that they would rest satisfied with their present attainments; and hence his anxiety that they should go forward, — proceed from strength to strength, and seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There is, indeed, a growth in grace, and good men are often the subjects of it, when they are least satisfied with themselves; for the deepening of their repentance, the discovery of the hidden evil of their hearts, and the humble and contrite spirit which

such experience creates, are no uncertain signs of advancement in the Christian life, whilst these feelings uniformly constrain men to desire so to walk as to please God, and to abound therein more and more.

There is also a growth in knowledge which must distinguish the true Christian, for the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. In the Lord Jesus are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and the Spirit which He bestows upon His people is 'the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.'

Depending on *His* gracious teaching, we are to cry after knowledge and to lift up our voice for understanding; we are to seek her as silver, and to search for her as hid treasure, and the promise is, that then we shall understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

These are the lessons which St. Paul would have us to learn in the school of Christ,—these are the attainments to which he would

have us aspire, 'till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'

Do our views of Christianity correspond with this? and whilst we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, are we earnestly studying how to walk and please God, and seeking to abound therein more and more?

Do any of my readers feel that it is not so with them, but that they are ready to say with Job, 'O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness?'

Let me entreat such to consider that it ought not so to be, that this is not the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them; and that it becomes them to humble themselves before God, to examine themselves as to the cause of their present declension, and to pray fervently for more of the grace and presence

of the Holy Spirit, to deepen their repentance, to increase their faith, and to enable them to press onwards in their Christian course.

Are any conscious that they have allowed the world with its allurements to steal upon them, and that they have imbibed its spirit, until the salt has lost its savour, and they have neither the power nor the influence in spiritual things which they once possessed? This is a perilous state of mind, and no one who values his own soul should be satisfied to continue in it. Oh, that such would remember that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and determine through grace, to take up their cross and follow Him, who gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God, even our Father.

Are any tempted to be weary in well-doing? Their patience may have been sorely tried, or they may have experienced many sorrows and disappointments, so that, like the people

of Israel, *their soul is much discouraged because of the way.*

This shows that their faith is weak, and that their strength is small ; consequently it is wrong, and forms the strongest possible reason why they should wait upon the Lord that they may renew their strength, until they mount up with wings as eagles, and learn to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.

In the words of the Apostle, *We beseech and exhort all such by the Lord Jesus, that as they have received, from Holy Scripture, how they ought to walk and please God, so they would abound more and more.*

XII.

SANCTIFICATION.

VER. 3-8.—For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit.

HAVING reminded the Thessalonians of the instructions which he had given them on the

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Christian life, how they ought to walk and please God, and having earnestly exhorted them to abound therein more and more, St. Paul enforces what he had already said by an argument founded on a truth of great practical importance, which is very clearly revealed. *For this, he says, is the will of God, even your sanctification.*

A brief consideration of the grace thus described, will enable us to perceive the meaning of the special caution which follows.

I. What then is sanctification? Sanctification, in the sense here referred to, is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is truly described in our Church Catechism as 'the Sanctifier of all the elect people of God,' and of this grace, we are here distinctly taught that it is the will of God concerning all who are His people.

The first part of the work of sanctification may be described as dying unto sin, mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, crucifying the old man with his evil deeds,

and carefully avoiding those habits which might prove prejudicial to the Christian life, or hinder us in running the race which is set before us.

This can only be accomplished by grace given us from on high, for we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, but God's grace is sufficient for us, and His strength is made perfect in weakness. On our part, let there be the earnest endeavour to resist all that is evil, with constant watchfulness and prayer and humble dependence on those great and precious promises which are given us for this end, and we may rest assured that sin shall not have the dominion over us, but that He who has so clearly revealed His will concerning us, will be with us to strengthen and uphold us, and to make us more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

There is another and very important part of the work of sanctification. It consists in the earnest endeavour to walk in newness of life, in following holiness, without which no man *shall see the Lord*, in hungering and thirsting

after righteousness, and in carefully cultivating those graces of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, gentleness, brotherly-kindness, and charity.

The exhortations on this subject are so numerous, and the language in which they are expressed is so clear, as to leave no room for misapprehension. Antinomianism has no place whatever in the word of God, every page of which breathes an opposite spirit, and tells us that God's people must be a holy people, and that the purpose of our Lord in giving Himself for us was to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.

And, whilst we ascribe the work of sanctification to the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, we must not forget that there are certain means through which it is carried on, and in the faithful use of which He will meet with and bless us.

Amongst these the first place must ever be given to the word of God, for this has been clearly indicated by our Lord Himself,

in His intercessory prayer, where He says, 'Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth.' The word of truth is the divinely appointed means for strengthening our faith, increasing our knowledge, and making known to us the will of God. If then we seek the grace of sanctification, we must hide that word in our hearts, as the Psalmist did, and meditate therein day and night.

Other means are also of great importance, —prayer, acts of social and public worship, and devout attendance at the table of the Lord. These ordinances are stamped with the Divine approval, and they have been channels through which the choicest blessings have flowed to those who have rightly used them.

There is another ordinance which is highly conducive to our sanctification, and which may be described as needful in order that other ordinances may be improved,—the due observance of the Lord's day.

REMEMBER THE SABBATH-DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY, is a precept of the moral law, which is

of perpetual obligation, written with the finger of God on the tables of stone, and re-written by its Divine Author in the hearts of His faithful people.

A great cloud of witnesses can be adduced to testify to the sanctifying influence of a due observance of this holy day, and to the blessed fruits which have resulted from it. It is not too much to affirm that in Scotland, at a time when evangelical preaching was rarely to be met with, the spirit of true religion was chiefly kept alive by the devout observance of this day. On the other hand, travellers in some of the Protestant countries on the Continent have noticed with regret the carelessness with which the Lord's day is observed, and the consequent blight which rests upon teaching which would otherwise be powerful and instructive.

Let those who would attain to sanctification of the Spirit take heed how they observe *the pearl of days!*

II. Having thus called their attention to

the great subject of sanctification, St. Paul proceeds to give special caution on certain points which circumstances rendered urgent and important. Would that such warnings were necessary only for those who have been recently reclaimed from heathenism, but we acknowledge, with shame and sorrow, that they are too applicable to many who live in Christian countries, and who have long enjoyed the light of revealed religion.

The Apostle's first caution is against immorality, against those degrading vices which, proceeding from the corrupt affections of our fallen nature, prove destructive to the present and future happiness of those who indulge in them. From these he beseeches them to abstain, and he tells them that *each of them should learn to master his body in sanctification and honour*,* not giving way to evil passions and impure desires, *as the Gentiles which know not God*, but maintaining the law of purity and righteousness, and seeking to live as those who

* Coneybeare and Howson's translation.

are not their own, but bought with a price, and who are therefore called to glorify God in their bodies and spirits, which are God's.

His second caution is against any breach of justice or integrity in our dealings with each other, *that no man go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter*; the original words must be understood primarily as a warning against the sin already condemned, but they 'may refer to any attempt to deprive another of his rights, whether it be the right which he has in his property, or his rights as a husband, or his rights in any other respect.'*

Under whatever pretence such things may be done, and however they may be cloked by a profession of religion, he tells them that *God is the avenger of all such, as he also had forewarned them and testified*, for He hath called us by His grace, not that we may continue in sin, but that we may be a holy people to Himself. He further reminds them that whoso despiseth such warnings will find that

* Barnes *in loc.*

he *despiseth not man but God*, because it is by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit that the Apostles have given to the churches these godly admonitions and exhortations.

The lesson conveyed to us by these verses is of great practical importance, and it is so clearly stated as to obviate any doubt or difficulty respecting it. It is simply this, that the will of God respecting all who believe in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is their sanctification.

Christian reader, be assured that this is the will of God concerning *you*. It is *not* His will to leave you under the dominion of any sin, or that you should cherish evil thoughts, impure desires, or unholy tempers; but it is His will to renew your heart, to purify your affections, and so to restore His image to your soul, that you may be found at last, through the gracious operation of His Spirit, a member of that glorious Church which shall be presented to Himself, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but which shall be holy and without blemish.

XIII.

COMMENDATION AND EXHORTATION.

VER. 9-12.—But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you : for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia : but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more ; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you ; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

WHEN our Lord addressed His message to the seven churches of Asia, He commended what was good and agreeable to His will in

them, before proceeding to give words of exhortation and reproof. He observed that order in addressing five out of the seven churches.

There is, doubtless, a lesson in this which is intended for our instruction. The human mind needs encouragement, and the wise man truly says, 'A word spoken in due season how good is it!' The prophet Isaiah spoke of a greater than himself when he said, 'The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned (the experienced) that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary;' and it is meet and right that where the fruits of righteousness are found, they should be acknowledged to the praise of God.

I. Following the example of his Lord, St. Paul here gives a word of commendation to the Thessalonian Christians, he says, *As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you; for yourselves are taught of God to love one another, and indeed ye do it towards all the brethren that are in all Macedonia.*

This was commendation indeed ; but why should the Apostle have recurred so soon to the subject of brotherly love ? Had he not referred to it in words which we have lately considered,* and breathed the most fervent prayer that ‘the Lord would make them to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men?’ Why should he thus again press the subject upon them ?

The question is easily answered. We are told that ‘out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,’ and the Apostle’s loving heart was full of the importance of this grace which he saw to be essential to the glory of God, to the happiness of His people, and to the advancement of true religion in the world.

Our Lord’s new commandment seems to have been ever present to the mind of this faithful servant, and he ceased not to urge it upon all who had received the knowledge of the truth, that they might show their love to the Redeemer by keeping His commandment.

* Chap. iii. 12.

Nor was he slow to acknowledge this grace when he saw evidence of its happy influence ; for he was ever ready to recognise it as the work of God, and to ascribe it to the inspiration of His Spirit.

It was doubtless with feelings of peculiar joy and thankfulness that St. Paul testified concerning the Thessalonian Christians *that they were taught of God to love one another, and that they did so toward all the brethren, which were in all Macedonia.*

How many things combine to call our attention to this grace ! On no subject is the will of God more clearly revealed, and this must be for great and important ends. Who can tell how far the declension of the Christian churches from primitive piety, and the introduction of religious errors and superstitious practices, may be ascribed to the neglect of brotherly love ? or who can say to what extent the absence of this grace may have proved a hindrance to the progress of Christianity, and the salvation of souls ?

We often hear religious men express regret that they have not the power or the ability to do the good they could desire, but here is something which all may do. We may all, in our respective spheres, however humble, exercise and promote brotherly love, and they who do so may rest assured that the Divine approval will attend their efforts, and that hereafter they shall meet with their reward.

It is also worthy of observation that at the very moment when St. Paul acknowledged that the Thessalonians were taught of God to love another, and that they did so toward all the brethren in Macedonia, he besought them *to increase more and more.*

Let us not suppose, then, that we have already given sufficient attention to this grace, but realizing that love is the best and highest gift, let us seek to abound in it more and more.

What would be so sure to promote the best interests of religion as that all who profess

and call themselves Christians should be *taught of God to love one another!*

II. With the words just quoted, St. Paul passes from commendation to exhortation; for whilst anxious for the increase of brotherly love, he does not overlook the importance of a faithful and conscientious discharge of the duties of social life.

He would have them *study to be quiet*. A quiet and peaceable life is that which specially becomes the followers of Christ,—a life uninfluenced by worldly ambition, free from the restless turmoil of the dissatisfied, — and practically showing to all men that this world is not our rest.

It is well and seasonable for us to be reminded of this, for we live in times of great political excitement and perplexity, when there is a feverish desire for change, and a disposition recklessly to depart from the ancient landmarks which our fathers had set up, which may prove to be the beginning of that state of things foretold

by our Lord, when men's hearts shall be 'failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth,' and when 'the powers which are in heaven shall be shaken.' In these circumstances we should *study to be quiet*; and whilst as citizens of a great country we have duties to perform which must not be neglected, we are at the same time to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

It will be a high privilege to serve God faithfully and wisely in times so perilous, and to maintain a meek and quiet spirit amidst surrounding agitation, perplexity, and distress. Let us aim at doing this, and let us remember that it was when the Prophet Isaiah had foretold the Divine judgments which were to come upon the nations, that he was permitted to give us that great and precious promise, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee,' and he added, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.'

Nor is the quietness of which the Apostle speaks merely a contemplative state of mind, for he links it with the diligent discharge of active duties; he says, *And to do your own business, and to work with your own hands as we commanded you.*

From the expression here used, it seems probable that a majority of the Thessalonian Christians belonged to the labouring classes; but the exhortation is clearly applicable to all classes of society, for all have their respective duties which must not be neglected, but, under the influence of true religion, discharged to the glory of God.

It is by such a course of conduct that we shall walk *becomingly* to the scrutinizing eye of the world, and that we *ourselves shall lack nothing.*

Such are the graces which should ever distinguish true Christians, — love to the brethren, quietness and confidence amidst external agitations and perplexities, and the diligent and faithful discharge of duty, in

the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us.

These are the good works, by which 'a true and lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit.'*

* Art. XII.

XIV.

COMFORT FOR THE BEREAVED.

VER. 13, 14.—But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

It is not surprising that the Father of mercies and God of all comfort should have provided in His most holy and perfect word for the consolation of those who mourn the loss of relatives and friends. The numerous passages which tell us of the blessedness of those who have departed hence in the Lord were

doubtless given for this end, that we may know that being absent from the body they are present with the Lord, permitted to behold His glory, and to serve Him day and night in His heavenly temple.

In the verses before us the ground of consolation is not, however, the immediate happiness of the departed, but the prospect of their being raised at our Lord's appearing, and made partakers of the glory which shall then be revealed; and from the general tenour of the passage it seems probable that it was written to correct some mistakes into which these recent converts to Christianity had fallen.

It is evident that their hope had been prominently directed to the coming and kingdom of our Lord, and as the fact of a long intervening period was only gradually revealed, they may have felt perplexed at the decease of many pious friends, and have been led to fear that although saved from the wrath to come, they would not participate in the

special happiness of those who shall be alive at the Lord's appearing.

I. Viewed in this light, how rich is the consolation afforded by these words, *I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

Sleep was beautifully described by a heathen writer as 'death's lesser mystery,' but the Christian can say more than this; he can reverse the order, and speak of *the greater mystery* as a sleep, a gentle sleep appointed for the body until the Lord shall come. The pious dead *sleep in Jesus*, united to Him who is their living head, and who has already robbed death of its sting and the grave of its victory.

For the loss of such we may indeed sorrow, for it has been truly said that 'grace never destroys, but only regulates and corrects nature . . . It doth not stifle all modest complaints and moderate sorrow, but will permit us to complain of what we suffer, so long as

it keeps us from complaining of that God from whom we suffer.' *

We may then sorrow, nay, we may freely shed tears at the loss of those who have been dear to us, for the Lord Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, but it ill becomes us to indulge in the excessive grief of those who have no hope. This was the case of even the most illustrious heathen, *they had no hope*. We do not for a moment presume to pronounce upon their future state, or to say what the righteous Judge of all the earth will decide concerning them, but we affirm simply, as a matter of fact, that *they had no hope*, they were not in possession of any such principle, and were wholly strangers to the comfort and strength which arise from it.

This is very affectingly expressed in their writings, and an eminent expositor of the Greek Testament † quotes the following passages in illustration of it. Theocritus says, 'Hope goes with life; all hopeless are the

* Bishop Hopkins. † Dean Alford, *in loc.*

dead :’ Æschylus, ‘Once dead there is no resurrection more :’ Catullus, ‘Suns may set and may return ; we when once our brief life wanes have eternal night to sleep.’

The immoderate grief of Cicero and other illustrious men for the loss of their children is well known, and it was truly the sorrow of those who have no hope.

In contrast with this sad experience, the early Christians had hope, a well-founded hope, and it was meet and right that this should be apparent in seasons of bereavement, and in times of trial and persecution.

It was truly so ; and we possess many interesting records, not only of the firmness of their faith and the brightness of their hope, but of the effect which was thereby produced on the heathen mind.

In his essay on *The Constancy of the Early Christians*, Addison ascribes the conversion of many distinguished men to this source ; he says, ‘It is certain that the deaths and sufferings of the primitive Christians had a

great share in the conversion of those learned Pagans who lived in the ages of persecution. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and others, tell us that this first of all awakened their curiosity, roused their attention, and made them seriously inquisitive into the nature of that religion which could endue the mind with so much strength, and overcome the fear of death, nay, raise an earnest desire of it, though it appeared in all its terrors.'

Such is the Christian's hope, the hope that maketh not ashamed; and it becomes us to be moderate in our sorrow for the loss of those whose privilege it has been to live and die under its influence.

II. St. Paul further continues his instruction by reminding them of the identity of our Lord and His people in death and in resurrection. *For, he adds, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*

We all believe that *Jesus died and rose*

again; let us also firmly believe that those who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him, that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory.

This great and consolatory truth is most clearly revealed to us, and it is so that we may live under its influence, cherish the return of our Lord as our blessed hope, and thus be constrained to love and long for His appearing.

How blessed to realize this great re-union, and to anticipate the time when all who have lived and died in the Lord shall be brought together with Him—when the Lord shall come with ten thousands of His saints, and when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

And if St. Paul gave this as the highest source of consolation to the bereaved, it is clearly implied that we shall recognise each other; for if it were otherwise, it is impossible to see what consolation could be afforded by this hope.

We have already observed that the Apostle taught this in the words which occur at the close of the second chapter of this epistle, where he says, 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?' If the exposition of that passage required any further confirmation, we have it in the fact that the bereaved are here comforted with the assurance that their departed friends shall return with our Lord in glory.

Let us all, then, take comfort concerning the blessed dead, for they sleep in Jesus, and their happy spirits, freed from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity beholding His glory, and serving Him in the sanctuary above.

We have indeed lost much in them—their love, their sympathy, their society, their example, and their prayers, and we are not forbidden to mourn for them, provided it be with becoming moderation, and submission to the will of God, showing to all men that we

sorrow not as those who have no hope, but that our grief is mingled with the joyful expectation, that those who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him.

And if when our call shall come, we would be found in Christ, thus giving our beloved friends the best and surest comfort concerning us, oh, let us examine ourselves whether we possess this hope, and are living under its influence !

The world knows it not ; the careless and ungodly know it not ; the formalist and self-righteous possess it not. Many, alas ! who have lived in Christian countries, surrounded by religious privileges, have descended to the grave without hope and without God, thus depriving their bereaved friends of all true consolation concerning them.

But how blessed have been the fruits of this grace in those who possess it, in sustaining them amidst the winds and waves of this troublesome world, in strengthening them to endure temptation, and in giving them the

most calm and happy feelings at the approach of death.

The land of Beulah described by the gifted author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the happy pilgrims walked about guarded by the 'shining ones,' ready to cross the river, and to enter the celestial city, is something more than allegory, for it describes the experience of many good men, who have felt their fears removed, their faith and love increased, and their hope become more and more bright as the end drew near.

This was strikingly expressed in a letter which the devoted Dr. Payson addressed to his sister shortly before his death. 'Were I,' he says, 'to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been for some weeks a happy inhabitant. The celestial city is full in my view; its glories beam upon me; its breezes fan me; its odours are wafted to me; its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing

separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but as an insignificant rill that may be crossed at a single step when God gives permission.'

How blessed is such experience! How glorifying to God! How full of comfort and encouragement to those who witness it!

Who is there that does not feel constrained to say, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?*

XV.

THE ORDER OF EVENTS AT THE COMING
OF OUR LORD.

VER. 15-18.—For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

HAVING comforted the Thessalonian Christians with the assurance that the blessed dead

shall be brought with our Lord at His appearing, St. Paul proceeds to announce to them the order of events which shall then occur. He does so with great solemnity, and he prefaces his statement by informing them that what he now declared had been the subject of a special revelation to himself. He says, *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

It is important to observe that whilst all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, there are certain parts of Scripture which were given by special revelation, being communications of the Divine mind on subjects which could not otherwise have been known. This is one of these ; and whilst the events connected with the Advent were thus communicated to him, he seems as yet to have known little of the intervening period, for the language here used implies that he thought it possible that he might himself be spared till his Lord should

come. He says, *We which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent* (go before) *them which are asleep.*

When our Lord shall come, there must, of necessity, be a generation of living saints, but these shall not take precedence of the blessed dead, who shall be remembered by Him who is 'the resurrection and the life,' and shall be the first objects of His care, in that day.

I. Having so said, St. Paul now makes the grand announcement, that *the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.*

It is the Lord Himself for whom we wait, and whose advent is our blessed hope. It is He who will descend from the heaven of heavens where He now is, into the heaven of this planet which we inhabit; and there are three things specially mentioned here as the accompaniment of His Advent.

1. It will be *with a shout*; the original word (*κρῆσμός*) is descriptive of the shout by which

commanders encourage their soldiers in battle, or of the joyful exclamation of sailors, when, after a long voyage, they first see the land.

It is supposed by some divines that this shout is especially addressed to the angels, who are represented as accompanying their Lord, and taking a very prominent part in the solemnities of that day. In the magnificent description of the second Advent which we find in the fiftieth Psalm, we read that 'He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people;' and it seems probable that this shout is the call to the heavens from above, which shall summon ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels to the presence of their Lord, whilst the trumpet is to be addressed to the inhabitants of the earth.

2. There will also be *the voice of the archangel*, or, as the Syriac version renders it, 'the Prince of the angels.' We read of 'Michael the archangel,' in the epistle of St.

Jude, but these are the only passages where the archangel is spoken of. That there are various orders or gradations amongst the angelic host seems to be implied from the titles given them of 'thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers,' and it is not unreasonable to conclude that there is one mighty angel, placed by Divine sovereignty over the others, who is specially described as *the archangel*, and whose voice is to be heard amidst the glories of that day.

It is also worthy of observation that whilst St. Jude speaks of 'Michael the archangel,' the Prophet Daniel describes Michael as 'the great prince which standeth up for the children of thy people.'

Have we not in this another proof of God's unchanging love to Israel, in that they are specially committed to the care of the Prince of the angels? And may not the voice of the archangel convey a special summons to God's ancient people, at the advent of their Lord?

3. There is also to be heard the *Trump of God*. This seems to be addressed to the inhabitants of the earth whether dead or alive, and it is frequently spoken of in connexion with the great and terrible day of the Lord. Thus, our Lord tells us that 'He will send His angels with the great sound of a trumpet to gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other ;' and St. Paul, referring to the same eventful day, says, 'At the last trump ; for the trumpet shall sound.'

Such are the wonderful accompaniments of our Lord's descent into the heaven (*i.e.*, the atmosphere or firmament) of our planet, probably corresponding with 'the sign of the Son of man in heaven,' and to be distinguished from His subsequent descent to the earth itself, in the day when His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives.

II. Immediately following this, there shall be the resurrection of the dead, and the change of the living saints ; the former shall take

precedence, *the dead in Christ shall rise first* (all who have ever lived in Christ and died in Christ), and then we which are alive and remain, having experienced that great change which is equivalent to resurrection, *shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

In the memorable passage on this subject which we have in his first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul says, 'Behold, I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'

The risen and the living saints are thus prepared to ascend simultaneously to meet their Lord in the air, and then will that perfected union take place which is described in the Apocalypse as THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB, when His people gathered from all

lands, washed in His blood, clothed in His righteousness, and sanctified by His Spirit, shall be changed into His image, and presented to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but pronounced to be holy and without blemish.

Thus, grace shall be consummated in glory; but it is only through grace that we can be made partakers of the glory. On the other hand, nothing is more sure and certain than that all who are Christ's faithful soldiers and servants now, shall be partakers of the glory which shall be revealed hereafter.

Wherefore, let us comfort one another with these words. Let the bereaved be comforted. The spirits of those who have departed hence in the Lord are in joy and felicity. They see His face; they behold His glory; they stand on the sea of glass which is before the throne, having the harps of God. And the time will soon arrive when their bodies shall rise again; when from those loved remains which you committed to the grave with so many tears,

'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' shall arise that new and wonderful organization which shall be fashioned like unto *His* glorious body, and fitted for entering upon that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that faded not away.

Oh, blessed hope! Oh, unspeakable consolation! that we are thus permitted to anticipate the time when death shall be swallowed up in victory, and when all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes!

And, let us all take comfort from this as we contemplate the approach of death. It is meet and right so to do, for life is always uncertain, and the earthly house of this tabernacle must be dissolved; but it is blessed to know that when absent from the body we shall be present with the Lord; and as regards the flesh let us be content that it shall rest in hope, waiting for that happy time when He that shall come will come, and will not tarry; and when, according to His most sure

and certain promise we shall hear *His* voice who is the resurrection and the life, and experience that mighty power whereby *He* is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

READINGS ON CHAPTER V.

XVI.

THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS.

CHAP. v. 1-3.—But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

HAVING directed their attention to the Advent of our Lord as the great object of hope and expectation, St. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had already instructed them in

all that was necessary for them to know respecting *the times and the seasons*, for they *themselves knew perfectly that the day of the Lord would so come as a thief in the night.*

In the case of the early Christians, it seems to have been the will of God that they should rest satisfied with this amount of knowledge, and leave intervening events to be unfolded as Divine wisdom should see fit.

This is implied in the words spoken by our Lord to His disciples immediately before His ascension, when in answer to their inquiry, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' He said unto them, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power, but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'

As in the case of individual Christians, milk is provided for babes, and strong meat

for those whose experience is more mature, so with the Church in her infant state, it may have seemed good to her Divine Head that she should simply be made acquainted with the grand object of her hope, without the additional knowledge of the times which were to intervene.

There is here, moreover, a lesson for us all to abstain from carnal curiosity and unbecoming speculation on a subject so sacred, and seek rather to be prepared for the event, that it may not come upon us unawares.

On the other hand, we are not to be inattentive to those signs which it has pleased God to reveal to us, but wisely and devoutly to consider them ; and it was the neglect of this, which our Lord reproved in the Jews when He said unto them, ‘Oh, ye hypocrites ! ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times ?’

In directing attention to the Lord’s dealings with His people in this respect, a learned writer observes, ‘The measure of light vouch-

safed to the Church, and attainable by each Christian, increases from age to age. Under the Old Testament one period after another was revealed; and the true limits of each in its turn became clear as its end was approaching. It was near the close of the Egyptian captivity that Moses began to discern the time, and near the end of the captivity in Babylon that Daniel understood by reckoning the number of the years. It was when the predicted weeks had almost run out that Simeon was waiting for Messiah, and had the promise given him that he should see the Lord's Christ. The same principle is also true under the Gospel. The prophetic times have been revealed from the first; but the Divine seal placed on many of them was to be removed. Every century as it rolled on lessened the motive for concealment, and increased the need of a partial unveiling of them to sustain and guide the hope of the Church. The declarations that the end was near would afterwards have become a snare to the faith of

Christians, as they have been to infidels, unless it were known that the delay also was predicted, and a limit assigned for its continuance in the word of God itself.

‘And surely if in those first ages, the ignorance of the Church was a strong motive to watchfulness, when the end is really near, and within one generation, an assured knowledge of its nearness will be a motive still more powerful, and one which the Lord will not withhold from His faithful people.’*

We are not then to neglect the signs which are given to us in the Scriptures—such signs as many running to and fro, and knowledge being increased; † the rapid preaching of the Gospel throughout the world; ‡ the great tribulation passing away from the Jews; § the sudden outburst of Popery, infidelity, and lawlessness, || with the increasing struggle between good and evil; the general distress of

* Professor Birks, *in loc.* † Dan. xii. 4.

‡ Matt. xxiv. 14; Rev. xiv. 6, 7. § Matt. xxiv. 29–34.

|| Rev. xvi. 13.

nations with perplexity.* These things are clearly and distinctly foretold, and from the fact that these are being fulfilled before our eyes, we may safely conclude that the great consummation must be relatively near.

Still, the day of the Lord will come upon the world like a thief in the night, for *when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

This was very clearly announced by our blessed Lord Himself, who said that ‘As a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth,’ and that ‘As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.’

We are not, then, to expect any great improvement in the state of society before the

* Dan. xii. 1, and Luke, xxi. 25, 26.

Advent of our Lord, but the reverse; the children of this world will be eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage; scoffers will be 'walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;' men will in their own conceits be predicting many years of prosperity; ungodly statesmen will be proudly asking, 'Who is the Lord that we should serve Him?' *Peace and safety* will be words in all men's mouths; but these are the very signs of the long-looked-for consummation, and in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—there shall be heard the voice of the archangel and the trump of God announcing the approach of Him who is the righteous Judge of all.

BEHOLD, HE COMETH WITH CLOUDS, AND EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM, AND THEY ALSO WHICH PIERCED HIM, AND ALL KINDREDS OF THE EARTH SHALL WAIL BECAUSE OF HIM. EVEN SO, AMEN.

XVII.

THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

VER. 4-7.—But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

THE world may be involved in darkness,—even in darkness which may be felt, like that which covered the land of Egypt,—but there are those who like the children of Israel have light in their dwellings, and of such the Apostle says, *Ye, brethren, are not in darkness*

that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day : we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

The Lord Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life,' and such has been the happy experience of all who have believed and trusted in Him, and who have taken up their cross to follow Him. He has opened their eyes, and turned them from darkness unto light; He has given them the light of truth, the light of purity and righteousness, the light of life. He has made them emphatically *the children of light, and the children of the day.*

It is important to realize this, for the world is in darkness,—the unbelieving are in darkness,—the sensual and impure are in darkness,—the votaries of pleasure are in darkness,—and they who turn aside to religious error (however plausible such error may be), are in darkness. Christ alone is the true light;

and they only who follow Him whithersoever He leadeth them, are the children of light and of the day.

How blessed it is when men feel that they are walking in the light of the Lord; that imperfect and sinful as they are, ever coming short of His glory, doing many things which they ought not to do, and leaving undone many things which they ought to do, they are, nevertheless, conscious of the fervent and sincere desire to abide in Him, and to be in all things guided by His word and Spirit.

In the experience of such, the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth, *they are not of the night, nor of darkness*; and it would ill become them to *sleep as do others*, for their calling is to *watch and be sober*, to have their loins girt and their lamps burning, and to be like men who wait for their Lord.

Night is the time for sleep, and it is too often made the time for unseemly revelry; *they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night*, and when

the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, there is reason to fear that too many will be found in carnal security, or in sinful indulgence. We mourn to think that it shall be so, and we tremble to anticipate the sudden destruction in which so large a number of our fellow-creatures will then be involved.

Oh, that we could prevail on men soberly and wisely to contemplate that great event, the suddenness with which it will come, and the momentous interests which are involved in it, and to ask themselves whether they are prepared for it. Who does not tremble at the prospect of being found in that day in carelessness or in sensual indulgence? Nay, who does not shrink from the thought of being found at the theatre, the racecourse, or the gambling-table, when the trump of God shall be heard in all its majesty and glory, by the astonished inhabitants of the earth?

And, be it remembered, that we who have

lived in Christian countries cannot place ourselves in the position of those who have known nothing else than heathen darkness.

When our Lord addressed to Nicodemus that great summary of Gospel truth, saying, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.' When He had so said, He added, 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.'

We learn from these words that rejected light will be the great cause of condemnation hereafter, and that by knowing the fact of God's love to man in giving him His only-

begotten Son, we incur a responsibility of which we can by no means divest ourselves.

The danger of thus rejecting light and neglecting opportunities was very early revealed, for we find in the book of Proverbs that very solemn warning, 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.'

The judgment of the great day will indeed be righteous judgment, and we can understand how the rejection of the Saviour, and of the light and life which might have been enjoyed through Him, will constrain the ungodly to call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and to hide them from the wrath of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

The Lord hide us in His pavilion in that day, and grant us to be found with those whose sins are pardoned, whose hearts are

sanctified, whose portion is God Himself, and who (through grace) shall be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light!

It shall be so with all who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and follow Him, for *they are the children of the light and of the day, they are not of the night nor of darkness.*

But, let the children of light take heed that they 'walk in the light,' for this is their holy calling. They are to cultivate all moral purity, all righteousness of heart and life, that they may adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things.

And they who do so shall not live in vain, for the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself, and through such He is pleased to carry on His purpose of grace and loving-kindness in the earth.

Oh, let them remember that when our Lord said unto His disciples, 'Ye are the light of the world,' He added, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

XVIII.

THE HOPE SET BEFORE US.

VER. 8-11.—But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love ; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

THE children of light have a bright and blessed hope set before them, and this should animate them with great courage for the conflict in which they are engaged, and check every feeling of despondency or unbelief.

That the conflict is great indeed cannot be

denied, for we are told that 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,' and therefore it is that we need the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.

I. St. Paul, then, exhorts the children of light to avail themselves of the armour provided for them, and with the courage of true Christian soldiers, to fight the good fight of faith, fully expecting to be more than conquerors, through Him who loved us; He says, *let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love.*

In the warfare of ancient times, the breastplate was considered of great importance, for it protected the heart with other vital parts, and we are here reminded that the graces by which the heart of the Christian soldier must be defended are faith and love.

There must be *faith*; faith in its most

simple and lively exercise, resting firmly on Christ Himself, and holding fast whatever He has promised to His people. St. Paul knew this by personal experience, and was therefore well qualified to speak of it to others; he elsewhere says, 'the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

Here is a great example for our imitation, for if St. Paul with all his miraculous endowments, lived simply by faith, it should be our constant aim to do the same,—to live by faith, to walk by faith, and to seek to overcome by faith.

Such faith is the gift of God, and it is unspeakably precious, for without it, it is impossible to please God, but through its instrumentality all blessings for time and for eternity become ours. Nor should any one despair of obtaining this, for it is given in the use of those means which are placed within our reach; 'faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'

May the Lord increase the faith of His people, and grant the like precious gift to many in these times through the preaching of His own most holy and perfect word!

And whilst this grace enables us to maintain a good warfare, oh, let us take heed that our breastplate has the inner lining of *love*, for love is the highest and best of gifts, which is at once the evidence of sonship, and the preparation for the kingdom of heaven. St. John testifies that 'every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; but that he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.'

Let us earnestly pray that the love of God may be shed abroad in all our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us, and let us not forget that our Lord has warned us of a time when 'because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold.'

We have much cause to remember this in our own eventful times, and by building up ourselves on our most holy faith, and praying

in the Holy Ghost, to keep ourselves in the love of God.

Happy are they who amidst the great conflict with Popery and infidelity, ritualism and rationalism, religious lawlessness and fanaticism, are fighting manfully under Christ's banner, and calmly putting on *the breastplate of faith and love!*

We are further exhorted to take *for an helmet the hope of salvation*. The helmet protected the head, and must have been specially important in days when warfare was carried on chiefly by darts and arrows. The soldier who wore a helmet could lift up his head with a measure of confidence which he could not enjoy whose head was without this protection. Such is the effect of a well-grounded hope,—a hope of salvation arising from the sure and certain promises of God, for hope is the result of faith, and may be described as the grace by which we wait for the fulfilment of those promises which faith has already apprehended.

‘Faith,’ says the gifted author of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, ‘comes by hearing; hope by experience. Faith believeth the truth of the word; hope waits for its fulfilment. . . . Faith fights for doctrine; hope for a reward. Faith for what is in the Bible; hope for what is in heaven.’

The same view is happily expressed by another quaint old writer, who says, ‘The promise is, as it were, God’s love-letter to His Church and Spouse, in which He tells all He means to do for her. Faith reads and embraces it with joy; whereupon the believing soul by hope looks out at this window with a longing expectation to see her husband’s chariot come in the accomplishment thereof.’*

If then we have believed in Christ, and are become the children of God by faith in Him, we should by all means cherish a good hope, for it is capable of exercising the most strengthening and sanctifying influence upon our minds; for every man that hath this hope

* Gurnall’s *Christian Armour*.

in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.'

St. Paul describes the hope set before us as 'an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast;' nay, so important did he feel it to be that he elsewhere says, 'we are saved by hope,' and although he probably uses the word 'saved' in the sense of 'sustained' or 'supported,' the expression conveys to us a lively impression of the value which he attached to this grace.

An incident which occurred a few years ago may be given as affording a simple illustration of the power of hope upon the mind. A small vessel was lost off the coast of Norfolk on a Sunday morning, and amongst the persons on board there happened to be a father and son, who both succeeded in reaching one of the numerous buoys fixed off that coast. Having clung to it for a long time, the father felt that his strength was failing, and he exclaimed, 'Farewell, my boy, I feel that I can hold on no longer.' The son replied, 'Oh,

father, remember that this is Sunday, and they will be praying in all the churches *for those who travel by land or by water* ; God will surely send us help.'

The boy's *faith* revived the father's *hope* ; he continued to hold on till a vessel came in sight which rescued them from their perilous situation. He was thus saved by hope. It was not indeed hope that took him out of the water, but hope sustained and supported him till the deliverance came.

Let us then, in running the Christian life, cherish this grace, for it will sustain us in the evil day ; and if we would so fight the good fight of faith as to lay hold on eternal life, let us not forget *to take for an helmet the hope of salvation.*

II. But St. Paul proceeds to confirm his exhortation by a very powerful argument, which is this. *For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him,*

The coming of the day of God may well inspire terror into the minds of the ungodly and unprepared, but it should produce no such effect upon His people, and for this reason, that *God hath not appointed us to wrath*. No, none are appointed unto wrath save the impenitent and unbelieving, those who have refused the invitations of His grace, and who continue in carelessness and sin. He hath appointed His people *to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*; this is their bright and happy prospect, their sure and certain hope. The coming of the Lord is to them the consummation of bliss both in body and soul, and should be wholly separated in their minds from any feeling of terror or dismay. They should love it and long for it, realize it as the most blessed of all events, and set their hearts' best affections upon it.

Let us be careful to cultivate this state of mind; for if, through grace, we have attained to repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the great end of the Re-

deemer's death is accomplished in us, and it is His gracious and unchanging purpose that *whether we wake or sleep, whether we are numbered with the living or the dead at the time of His appearing, we should live together with Him.*

Wherefore, adds the Apostle, comfort one another with these words. These are indeed words of comfort, and they should produce the most soothing effect upon our minds.

Is the night far spent? Be it so; the day is at hand,—the day which shall be unclouded by sin or sorrow, when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Is the trump of God about to announce to the apostate powers which have corrupted His truth and hindered the progress of His kingdom that the hour of His judgment has come? It may be so, but when that sound is heard, 'The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.'

Has the time arrived, when amidst social, religious, and political perplexity, men's hearts begin to fail them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth? It is even so; but these signs are peculiarly welcome to the Lord's waiting people, for He has said, 'When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.'

Then let all who love their God and Saviour adopt the words of the sweet singer of Israel, and say,—

OUR SOUL WAITETH FOR THE LORD; HE IS
OUR HELP AND OUR SHIELD.

FOR OUR HEART SHALL REJOICE IN HIM;
BECAUSE WE HAVE TRUSTED IN HIS HOLY
NAME.

LET THY MERCY, O LORD, BE UPON US, AC-
CORDING AS WE HOPE IN THEE.

XIX.

WORDS FOR THE FLOCK.

VER. 12, 13.—And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

THERE is no radicalism in the New Testament. There is none in its politics, for we are there taught that the powers which be are ordained of God, whilst we are repeatedly exhorted to fear God, to honour the king, to obey magistrates, and to pray for kings and for all that are in authority.

There is none in the polity of the New Testament Church, for whilst its constitution and ordinances are beautiful in their simplicity, they are clearly defined, and obedience to them is strictly enjoined.

There is indeed no priesthood; that has passed away, having received its accomplishment in the Lord Jesus, its great antitype, who is our high-priest for ever, and who by His death upon the cross, has caused the sacrifice and the oblation to cease; but there is a ministry of reconciliation, instituted and ordained for the glory of God, the advancement of His kingdom, the edifying of His people, and the saving of souls.

If we pervert the Christian ministry into a priesthood, we dishonour the Lord Jesus, and open the door for errors which may prove fatal to ourselves. If we put aside our ministry from impatience of its restraint, or through any plausible theories of more extensive usefulness and greater liberty of action, we grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who is the author of order, and by whose grace alone it is that pastors and teachers are given for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ.

We learn from the Acts of the Apostles and

from the Epistles, that wherever a church of professing Christians was formed, through the preaching of the Gospel, the Apostles proceeded to ordain elders or presbyters for the ministry of the word, and the maintenance of such order as tended to secure the general edification.

St. Paul had done so at Ephesus and in other cities, and it is evident from the passage before us that he had done so at Thessalonica, for the words used imply the previous institution of the pastoral office amongst them, and were clearly designed to secure for it their respect and obedience.

In seeking to impress this upon them, the Apostle may be said to describe the pastoral office in a threefold character.

1. The first of these is *labour*; he says, *we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you*; the work entrusted to Christ's ministers is indeed a work of labour; they are labourers together with God,—labourers in His vineyard,—labourers in His harvest,—

labourers in the word and doctrine. They labour to expose error, and to feed the flock of God which He hath purchased with His own blood; they labour for the conversion of souls, and must be instant in season and out of season, seeking to lead all men to repentance towards God, and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul was personally well acquainted with the ministry as a work of arduous and incessant labour, for he could say with truth, 'I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,' and he has left the ministers of Christ in all ages an example to follow him in the devotedness and self-denial with which he followed Christ.

2. The pastoral office is also here described as a work of *government*. The Apostle reminds them that they who laboured among them were *set over them in the Lord*. It must be so; government is absolutely necessary for the welfare of any church, and, it may be

added, for the welfare of any society or community, for without it there will be confusion and every evil work. The authority given to Christ's ministers is not indeed magisterial, far less is it tyrannical, but rather paternal,—such authority as the head of a family has over his household. It is, however, bestowed from on high for great and important ends, and it may neither be treated with levity, nor presumptuously set aside.

It is the duty of all Christian pastors to maintain wholesome discipline, and when this is done with mingled faithfulness and love, it is glorifying to God, and highly conducive to the edifying of His people.

In seeking to execute an office which often proves both delicate and difficult, Christian pastors have much need to be supported by the prayers and encouraged by the sympathy and co-operation of their people.

3. The Apostle further intimates that the ministerial office is intended for *admonition*. The pastors set over Christ's flock are to *ad-*

monish them ; they are at all times to abound in godly counsels and admonitions, in practical exhortations, and words in season. This forms an important part of their office, and it cannot be neglected without doing injury to the cause of true religion.


It would be difficult to find a better illustration of such godly admonition than that afforded us by St. Paul himself at the close of his Epistles. In these invaluable communications addressed to the churches, he frequently discusses the most abstruse and difficult points of doctrine, and makes the most profound statements in reference to Divine truth ; but with what marvellous ease does he pass from these exalted themes to drop words of admonition on the most common subjects of daily life, often sending messages to individuals on points which appear to us of secondary importance.

It is thus he would have all Christian pastors to watch over others, and be ready to give words of loving counsel when they see any

members of their flock turning to the right hand or to the left.

Now, the Apostle beseeches the Thessalonians to *know* such as thus faithfully discharge the duties of their office, that is, to acknowledge them as Christ's ministers, and to recognise the authority which He has given them for labour, for oversight, and for admonition.

This is wholly opposed to that lawless spirit which is sometimes manifested amongst those who profess and call themselves Christians, which would ignore all duly constituted authority, from a mistaken view of Christian equality and independence, the natural result of which is to lead men to foster spiritual pride and self-confidence. The rule laid down for us in the New Testament is this, 'All of you be subject one to another,' and the exhortation of St. Paul in the passage before us is, that they who rightly discharge the onerous and important duties of the pastoral office should be *esteemed very highly in love for their work's sake.*



It is for *their work's sake* that he claims for them the loving esteem of those amongst whom they minister. 'Not primarily as a personal matter, or on their own account,' as has been well observed, 'but on account of the work in which they are engaged. It is a work whose only tendency, when rightly performed, is to do good. It injures no man, but contributes to the happiness of all. It promotes intelligence, industry, order, economy, temperance, chastity, charity, and kindness in this world, and leads to eternal blessedness in the world to come. A man who sincerely devotes himself to such a work has a claim on the kind regards of his fellow-men.'*

And oh, let the members of all Christian churches who seek to promote the glory of God, the edification of His people, and the salvation of souls, bear in mind the precious words with which this apostolic exhortation closes, *Be at peace among yourselves.*

* Barnes, *in loc.*

XX.**WORDS FOR THE PASTORS.**

VER. 14, 15.—Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

WE find in the New Testament many godly exhortations addressed by the Apostles to those whom they had appointed to the office of the ministry. There is the charge given by St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus, where he so solemnly exhorts them to ‘take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the

Church of God which He had purchased with His own blood.’* There are the epistles addressed by the same Apostle to Timothy and Titus; and there are the beautiful and weighty words of St. Peter which we find in his first general epistle,† ‘The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.’

These and similar passages prepare us to expect and to render it extremely probable that after having pointed out the duty of the people to their pastors, St. Paul would proceed to address some words of counsel and

* Acts, xx. 28.

† 1 Pet. v. 1-4.

direction to those whom he had placed over them in the Lord.

This seems to be the true light in which we are to understand these verses. They are parenthetical, and whilst they convey special exhortations to the presbyters of the Thessalonian Church, they afford invaluable instruction for those who are called to the work of the ministry.*

To all such, to pastors and teachers in all ages, the Apostle may be considered to address these words,—

Warn them that are unruly; there are many imperfections in the best regulated churches; nay, there are many infirmities in the most sincere Christians. The temptation here referred to is not uncommon; and if unchecked, it may prove highly injurious to the interests of religion, for a spirit of insubordination is

* The view thus expressed will be found very clearly stated in *Scott's Commentary*; and it is supported by Coneybeare and Howson in their learned work on the *Life and Writings of St. Paul*. It is, however, opposed by Bengel, Dean Alford, and other able expositors.

never more likely to do harm than when it is manifested in those who wish to do good, but who are tempted to be unruly and to act (as the original word implies) like soldiers who quit their ranks.

In the narrative of the first religious revival in New England, which is given in the works of President Edwards, we learn that for some time there was every reason to attribute that movement to the Spirit of God, exerting His sacred and secret influence on the minds of men, throughout vast districts of country, leading them to deep repentance of sin, and to earnest seeking after God ; but, subsequently, these blessed fruits were blighted by a spirit of insubordination, many having been led, through mistaken zeal, to rush into the spheres or to interfere with the plans and duties of others ; and so great were the evils which arose from this source that the great Christian philosopher expresses his conviction that it would take fifty years to repair the harm thus done to the American churches.

It is to be feared that this spirit exists in our own times; for if there are unbecoming and unscriptural claims to priestly power and authority, it is impossible to close our eyes to the fact that there is also a disposition to forget those duties which we owe to each other in our respective spheres, and to act independently of others, as if their feelings, and the work in which they are engaged, were unworthy of consideration.

This is wholly opposed to the law of Christ; and wherever this spirit appears, it is the duty of those who feed the flock of God to *warn them that are unruly*.

Comfort the feeble-minded (or the faint-hearted). This is a more welcome task and more likely to be appreciated. Amongst the wonderful revelations made to Isaiah, none was more gracious than that in which the Lord said, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;' and as long as human infirmity continues, there will always be amongst God's people those who need to be comforted.

Whilst we are called to be strong in faith, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls does not forget the feeble-minded, and He would have His ministers to care for and consider them. They are to be comforted by those great and precious promises which are given for that end, and they are to be ever directed to the great Comforter, who is able to keep them calm and peaceful, and to revive the drooping hearts of those who, like Israel of old, are discouraged because of the way.

Oh, that we had more of the sympathizing love and tenderness of the great Shepherd, who gathers His lambs with His arm, and folds them in His bosom, and who gently leads those that are with young!

Support the weak: This is another blessed office intrusted to the Christian pastor; and our merciful High Priest would not have the weak to be despised, far less to be reproached for their weakness, or treated with harshness

or cruelty, but to be carefully and lovingly supported.

We read of those who 'out of weakness were made strong,'* and it is often through a sense of weakness that the Lord has been pleased to draw men to Himself, and to make them strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

It is the Lord who giveth strength and power unto His people, and He is pleased to use His ministers for this end, which is a special honour conferred upon them; for there can be no greater privilege than to direct the humble Christian in the hour of weakness to such promises as these: 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee, with the right hand of my righteousness.†

Oh, let the faithful pastors of Christ's flock remember that 'He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.'‡

* Heb. xi. 34. † Isa. xli. 10. ‡ Isa. xl. 29.

Be patient toward all men : Patience is a grace very useful to be cultivated, for we are called to exercise it at all times, and in many ways. In the biographical sketches of Scripture we find that the patience of good men has been greatly tried, and that their endurance has proved glorifying to God and edifying to His people.

The Lord is Himself long-suffering to usward, and He would have that gracious attribute to be reflected in His people,—above all in His ministers, as they feed the flock entrusted to them, and as they beseech all around them to be reconciled to God.

We read that ‘faith worketh patience,’ and we are exhorted to ‘let patience have its perfect work;’ and whether it be in waiting for the glorious consummation, or in exhibiting those fruits of present labour which are the earnest of it, there is much cause to possess our souls in patience, and we shall do well to remember the words of St. James : ‘Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit

of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until it receive the early and the latter rain.'

The Lord increase this grace, more and more, in the pastors of His flock, and save them from the reproof which He so solemnly addressed to the shepherds of Israel: 'Ye have not fed the flock; the diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.'

See that none render evil for evil unto any man. A spirit of revenge is wholly inconsistent with Christianity; and even in circumstances where it may become necessary to take certain steps to defend our persons, our property, or our reputation, this must not be done with any wish to render evil for the evil which we have endured.

Our Lord clearly laid down the rule to

be followed by His people when He said, 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy ; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'*

If, then, any feeling of revenge should arise in our poor hearts, it must be instantly checked, for nothing can be more dishonouring to God, or more grieving to His Spirit. In any circumstances, and under any amount of provocation, let us rather seek to cultivate the opposite spirit, 'not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing ; knowing that we are thereunto called that we should inherit a blessing.'†

But ever follow that which is good, both among

* Matt. v. 44, 45.

† 1 Pet. iii. 9.

yourselves and to all men. We read of our Divine Master that 'He went about doing good;' * and He would have His followers, and above all His ministers, do the same. Our calling is specially to do good, and never to be weary in well-doing; and whilst the household of faith have a first claim upon us, we are by no means to limit our good offices to them, but to seek, as opportunity offers, to promote the welfare and happiness of all men.

Let us, in our respective spheres remember that 'he that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.' †

Such were the good words which St. Paul addressed to the Presbyters of the Thessalonian Church, and we doubt not that they were words in season—nay, such exhortations are always in season, for it has been truly said that 'a word to a minister is sometimes worth a word to three or four thousand souls.' ‡

The Lord raise up for us many faithful ministers in these eventful times—pastors not

* Acts, x. 38. † 3 John, 11. ‡ M'Cheyne.

priests—teachers of truth, not triflers with error; men of God, not men of the world; men who preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, whose earnest desire is to edify and build up God's people on their most holy faith, and who seek with unwearied zeal, to turn many unto righteousness.

The faithful minister is well described by Bunyan in his well-known allegory, where he tells us that in the house of Interpreter, Christian saw a picture of a very grave person hung up against the wall. 'It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back; he stood as if he pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head.'

XXI.

GRACES TO BE CULTIVATED.

VER. 16-18.—Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks : for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

WHETHER we are right or not, in considering the preceding words to have been intended specially for the pastors of Christ's flock, there can be no question that pastors and people are alike interested in the exhortations which follow, for they refer to graces which are of great importance to us all, and without which we shall fall far short of what the Lord would have us to be.

If we have been made His children by faith, we must remember that we are to live by

faith, and finally to overcome by faith, and it is by such graces as are here specified, that our faith is to be proved genuine and sincere, and that we are to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Our Lord has Himself ordained that by their fruits His people shall be known, and He bestows His Spirit upon them that they may abound in the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

To all such, to all true Christians, St. Paul addresses this exhortation, when he says,—

Rejoice evermore ! The Gospel is itself glad tidings of great joy, and where it is rightly received, it cannot fail to give joy to the recipient. Thus when St. Peter preached to the astonished multitude on the day of Pentecost, we read that ‘they that *gladly* received his word were baptized,’ and subsequently when Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ to them, there was *great joy* in that city.

That our Lord would have His people to

experience this joy and to cherish it at all times, we learn from His own words, when He says, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.'

His first followers, amidst all their trials, seem to have tasted much of this joy. Thus we read of their being 'filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost,' and of their departing from the presence of the Council, 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.' Whilst, amidst the heaviness inseparable from manifold temptations, St. Peter bears testimony that, 'believing in Him, they rejoiced, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

It is the Lord's will that His people should at all times know this joy, and be sustained by it, amidst the trials and sorrows of this mortal life, for it is as true now as it was of old time, that 'the joy of the Lord is our strength.'

'Joy,' says an old writer, 'is a duty, a part

of religious devotion, required by God and very acceptable to Him; for as God would have His servants perpetually content, well-satisfied and cheerful in all states and upon all occurrences; so He doth especially demand from us, that we should entertain His favours with delight and complacence, it being very proper and seemly so to do.*

The duty then being clearly enjoined, we cannot too earnestly exhort all true Christians to cultivate this grace, and to beware of giving way to gloomy, desponding, or unbelieving thoughts, for by these our spiritual adversary gains great advantage over us.

Our trials may indeed be deep and mysterious, but we have always ground for joy and rejoicing in the Lord; in His love to usward; in His power and willingness to save us; and in the blessed hope of hereafter participating in His glory.

Well might the Apostle say, as He else-

* Barrow on *Tidings of Great Joy*.

where does, 'Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice.'*

Pray without ceasing. Who can estimate aright the privilege of prayer? the permission to draw near to God at all times, and to ask those blessings which we need, in humble submission to His will. Yet such is the privilege which is freely conferred upon us, and we are specially exhorted by our Lord to 'ask that we may receive, to seek that we may find, and to knock that it may be opened unto us.'

When St. Paul tells us to *pray without ceasing*, he would evidently impress upon us the importance of frequent and persevering prayer,—nay, his words imply that we should at all times breathe the atmosphere of prayer.

We are to pray for ourselves; we are to pray for others; we are to pray for the increase of the kingdom of grace, and the advent of the kingdom of glory.

This is a talent entrusted to all true Christians: and however lowly their lot, however

* Phil. iv. 4.

uninfluential their position may seem to be, it should comfort them to think that here is a great work given them to do ; and we shall never know in this world how much we are indebted to the prayers of the humble.

But cannot God bestow His blessings, and carry on His purpose without our prayers ? True ; He can do all things, and He *is* doing all things for His glory and for the happiness of His people ; but it is His will to be inquired of by us, and He has been pleased to ordain that great and inestimable blessings shall be bestowed in answer to prayer. This is happily expressed in the pious ejaculations of a quaint old English writer, who says, ‘ Lord, thou didst intend from eternity to make Christ the heir of all. No danger of disinheriting Him, Thy only Son, and so well deserving, yet Thou sayest to Him, “ *Ask of Me*, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, &c.” This homage He must do for Thy boon, to beg it. I see Thy goodness delights to have Thy favours sued for,

expecting we should crave what Thou intendest we should have . . . that so we may obtain Thy favours, not for our merit, but by the means of our petitions.*

Where men have little faith, or little fervency, in prayer, we cannot wonder that they lack many blessings which are otherwise within their reach; 'they have not, because they ask not,' but such a state of mind is unbecoming the Christian, and we should be on our guard against it, for the richest blessings are bestowed in answer to prayer.

Let us then seek to *pray without ceasing*. 'Let prayer be not only the key that opens the day, and the lock that shuts out the night, but let it be also from morning to night, our staff and stay in all our labours, and enable us to go cheerfully up into the mount of God.'†

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. He elsewhere exhorts us to 'give thanks always

* Fuller's *Scripture Observations*.

† Archbishop Leighton.

for all things.' Oh, that we could ever do so, for it would indeed be 'the Lord's song in a strange land.'

We should give thanks for our temporal mercies. How great is the sum of them, they are more in number than the sand ! Our Church, with pious care, has taught us to bless God 'for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life.'

For our creation, for it is He who hath made us and not we ourselves. *For our preservation*, for He has watched over us ever since we were born, fed us with food convenient for us, and preserved us from innumerable evils. *For all the blessings of this life*, for His mercies have been new every morning, and His tender mercies every night.

We should give thanks for our spiritual mercies ; and here also our Church has provided for us good and acceptable words, for she has taught us to add, *above all, for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the*

hope of glory. Yes! *above all*, for what were other mercies without this, without the knowledge of redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ? And yet, so blind are we by nature, that many do not feel this; for it is only when they are convinced of sin, and see their lost and ruined state, that they appreciate aright the blessings of redemption. It is through such experience that the new man in Christ Jesus is prepared to adopt the words of the Psalmist and to say, 'He brought me also out of an horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings, and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God.'

At whatever stage in the Christian race we may have arrived, we should carefully cultivate the spirit of thanksgiving, for it is in itself meet and right so to do, and we have the best of all encouragement in the Apostle's words, *This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

Oh, that the feeble thanksgivings which we are able to render in His courts on earth, may prepare us for the more exalted praises which the glorified saints shall render in the kingdom of heaven !

Such are the graces, to the cultivation of which St. Paul here exhorts us ; and they are unspeakably important, for if these things were in us and abounding, we should be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If then, we would live to the glory of God ; if we would experience the inward peace and happiness which true religion can afford ; if we would commend the Christian life to others, and be saved from creating prejudice against it, let us seek to *rejoice evermore ; to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks, for this is the will of God, in Christ Jesus, concerning us.*

XXII.

CAUTIONS TO BE OBSERVED.

VER. 19-22.—Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

How wonderful is the balance of truth maintained in Holy Scripture! Our finite minds are frequently unable to see more than some one limited portion of truth, and we are perhaps tempted to dwell upon this, to the exclusion of other things, until we are led into error from premises which are true when kept in their right place, and viewed in their due proportions.

The Law of the Lord is perfect ; His wisdom is manifold ; and it should be our en-

deavour to grasp not a part only, but the whole counsel of God. St. Paul did so; the sovereignty of God, and His love to man; His election unto eternal life, and the freeness of His grace; the safety of the true believer, and the danger of declension, these and many more of the deep things of God were taught by him in their due proportions, and without compromising any part of truth.

In the first chapter of this epistle, he had referred with peculiar satisfaction to the grace which he had seen in the Thessalonian Christians; and had expressed his belief in their election of God.* This was strong language to employ; but it did not prevent him from urging them to give diligence to make their calling and election sure, or from warning them against the danger of falling from their own steadfastness.

Hence the cautions which are here given, and which refer to points of permanent importance to all true Christians.

* Ch. i. 4

The first of these is,—

Quench not the Spirit.:—It is supposed by many persons that the work of the Holy Spirit was typified by the fire which was kept continually burning on the altar in the Temple; and this view seems to be strengthened by the fact that when the Holy Ghost descended on the primitive Church, ‘there appeared unto them cloven tongues, *like as of fire*, and it sat upon each of them.’

If so, and if the early Christians viewed it in this light, we can understand why St. Paul should adopt this form of expression, *Quench not the Spirit*.

In the opinion of certain learned expositors, the primary reference in this passage is to the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit, as it was enjoyed in the primitive Church; but without disputing the accuracy of this view, we may safely conclude that it was not intended to be limited to this, but that it conveys a caution to the same effect as that expressed by the Apostle, when he says,

‘Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.’*

In reviewing the history of ancient Churches, we see but too plainly how the Holy Spirit was grieved by the worldliness of professing Christians; by the neglect of God’s word, or by the introduction of superstitious practices and ceremonies, until the flame of true religion was quenched, and the gracious and quickening influences of the Spirit were withdrawn.

In the history of individuals there seems to be a point when the Spirit of God ceases to strive with man, when seeing him to be joined to his idols He leaves him alone; and without questioning the endurance of God’s true and faithful people, the caution here given, with similar warnings found elsewhere, is doubtless intended to lead us to continued watchfulness and prayer, lest we be betrayed into anything which may grieve the Holy Spirit, and quench His blessed influences in our souls.

* Eph. iv. 30.

Let us remember that we may quench the Spirit by the neglect of prayer, by ceasing to feed on God's most holy and perfect word, by forsaking appointed ordinances, by conformity to the world, or by giving place to unbelieving, impure, or unholy thoughts; and that, knowing these things, we should ever commit ourselves to Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Despise not prophesyings. We learn from the Acts of the Apostles that predictions of future events were frequently uttered by inspired persons in the primitive Churches, and St. Paul may have found it necessary to warn them that such utterances were not to be despised, but it seems more probable that the prophesying here referred to was the expository teaching, or preaching, of persons possessing gifts less extraordinary, but not less valuable, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

A learned divine describes prophesying in

this sense as 'discourse flowing from the revelation and impulse of the Holy Spirit, which, not being attached to any particular office in the Church, but improvised, disclosed the depths of the human heart, and of the Divine counsel, and was thus exceedingly effectual for the enlightening and consolation of believers, and the winning of unbelievers.'*

Admitting the probable correctness of this view, there is nevertheless a more extended application to expository teaching and preaching at all times, when given in prayerful dependence on the ordinary operations of the Spirit.

Such preaching has always been to them that perish foolishness; and it is to be feared that even some devout men have been tempted to undervalue it, as if they did not need such assistance. This is a great mistake, for no amount of religious knowledge can render the preaching of God's word unnecessary; and simply for this reason that it is His own

* Meyer, as quoted by Dean Alford.

appointed means for building up His people in their most holy faith, no less than for the conversion of souls.

It is one of the remarkable features of our own times, that whilst there is on the one hand a disposition to over-estimate preaching, especially when it is sensational, and accompanied by great powers of oratory, there is, on the other hand, a strong dislike to it by persons who have no objection to attend numerous services if they can have them without preaching.

Instances of this have become but too common, and one may be given as an illustration :— A nobleman's family, who were formerly very exemplary in attending their parish church, where the preaching was excellent, withdrew themselves altogether, and arranged two services on Sundays at their own great mansion, where prayers were read by a clergyman without any sermon or lecture, the object being obviously to get rid of the preaching of the word.

This is a perilous state of things, and must lead to great spiritual declension; for preaching, being God's ordinance, cannot be dispensed with; and those who lightly esteem it must be reminded of the wise man's warning, that 'whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed,' and of the fact, which St. Paul has testified that 'it pleaseth God by the *foolishness of preaching* to save them that believe.'

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. It is characteristic of true religion that it does not require us to take anything for granted, but courts the most free inquiry. He who gave man knowledge, has also given him an unchanging standard of truth, and tells him to prove or test all things.

It is not so with false or corrupt religion, which generally requires its votaries to yield a blind assent to its dogmas, however unreasonable they may be.

Thus, the Roman Catholic is forbidden to *prove all things*. He is told that he must abstain from the exercise of private judgment,

and believe whatever his Church believes; nay, the canon law affirms that if the Pope should see fit to declare virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue, no man may venture to question the truth of the decision.

In opposition to all this, the Christianity of the New Testament requires us *to prove all things*; and having done so, *to hold fast that which is good*. Truth of every kind, and on every subject, is good, and as such we are to hold it fast, at any sacrifice, but we are to reject whatever tends to error, however attractive it may appear.

The Lord grant us by His Holy Spirit a right judgment in all things, and teach us how to separate the precious from the vile!

Abstain from all appearance of evil. Evil is that against which, as Christians, we are pledged to contend; we are not only to abstain from evil, from every form or species of evil, but *from all appearance of evil*, for everything must be avoided that is capable of being mis-

understood, or of proving a stumbling-block in the way of others.

It was the desire to do this which constrained St. Paul to say, 'If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.'

What trials might be spared ; what misunderstandings might be prevented ; what friendships might be cemented ; were men more on their guard to abstain from all appearance of evil ! And were they more anxious, in a spirit of mingled faithfulness and humility to 'let their light so shine before men, that others seeing their good works may glorify their Father who is in heaven.'

If, then, we would make our calling and election sure ; if we would run with patience the race that is set before us, and so run that we may obtain ; if we would live to the glory of God, and be fruitful in every good word and work, let us treasure up in our hearts the holy cautions which are here given to us.

Let us watch against everything that may grieve or quench the blessed influences of the Spirit. Let us value the preaching of the Word, and beware lest we despise it, even in its most simple and least attractive form. Let us bring all things, however plausible they may appear, or from whatever source they may come, to the test of God's most holy and perfect Word ; and let us determine, by God's grace, to abstain, not only from all evil, but from all appearance of evil.

XXIII.

A VALEDICTORY PRAYER.

VER. 23, 24.—And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.

IN our Lord's intercessory prayer, in which He commends His disciples to the Father's care, and asks unutterable blessings for them, and for all who should believe in Him through their word, we find this petition, 'Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth.'

Guided by the same Spirit which rested above measure on His Divine Master, the faithful servant here pours out his soul in

supplication for the like blessing, *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This was a holy and a truly apostolic prayer, and it suggests to us what should ever be a subject of prayer for ourselves, and for all who are of the household of faith.

1. The blessing here invoked was *sanctification*. The persons for whom this boon was asked, were already justified: they had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and were accepted through Him, but the Apostle prays for them that they might be sanctified.

It is of great importance that we should distinguish well between justification and sanctification; the one is the act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons and accepts as righteous those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; the other is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He renews the soul of the believer in holiness and righteous-

ness, and makes it meet for the kingdom of heaven.

‘Justification,’ it has been well observed, ‘regards something done *for* us; sanctification, something done *in* us. The one is a change in our state, the other is a change in our nature. The one is perfect, the other is gradual. The one is derived from the obedience of the Saviour, the other from the work of the Spirit. The one gives us a title to heaven; the other gives us meetness for heaven.’

How strange it is that men should be unable to perceive the relative position of these great truths, which are both so clearly revealed! Hence the irrelevant and unbecoming observations which we are doomed to hear, that if justification is by faith alone, there can be no necessity for good works; that if salvation be all of grace, it matters little whether we be holy or unholy. Oh, strange perversion of the clearest truths! Oh, marvellous blindness of the natural man!

St. Paul felt far otherwise; and whilst he testified that we are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, he prayed for all who are so justified that the *God of peace would sanctify them wholly.*

2. In thus praying that they might be sanctified *wholly*, the Apostle clearly teaches us that the work of sanctification is progressive, for the words imply that their sanctification was already begun, and was being carried on in them.

It is so in the case of all true Christians, of all who have rightly believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, for of such we may without hesitation affirm that 'being made free from sin and become servants to God, they' have their fruit unto holiness.'

Hence the numerous expressions in which God's people are described as 'dying unto sin, and living unto righteousness,' 'putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in

righteousness and true holiness ;' 'growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ ;' and hence also the propriety of the wise man's words, when he describes the path of the just to be 'as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

With such words before us, what encouragement have we to pray for sanctification, to follow holiness, and to hunger and thirst after righteousness, fully expecting such supplies of God's grace as will sanctify and make us holy. On many points which are the subjects of prayer, we may doubt whether our petitions are according to the Divine will, but here there cannot be a doubt, for, as St. Paul has testified in a former chapter of this epistle, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification.'

3. Having poured forth this holy and Apostolic prayer, St. Paul gives force and confirmation to it by the words which follow, *and I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body*

be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He here uses a form of expression with which they were familiar, and accommodates himself to the philosophy of that age, which regarded man as possessing a threefold nature, body, soul, and spirit; bodily organization; animal life, including the senses and appetites, common to us with the inferior creatures; and spirit or mind, the seat of the reasoning powers.

The Jews had generally adopted this view, and there is nothing in it which is inconsistent with truth, or opposed to the modern and more advanced views of science.

Referring to the distinction here drawn between the animal and intellectual life, a learned expositor says, 'The spirit ($\piνευμα$) is the highest and distinctive part of man, the immortal and responsible *soul*, in our common parlance: the soul ($\psiυχη$) is the lower or animal soul containing the passions and desires, which we have in common with the brutes,

but which in us is ennobled, and drawn up by the Spirit.*

The Apostle's prayer then is simply that the whole man may be sanctified and consecrated to the service and glory of God; for, as an original writer observes, 'A man is wholly sanctified when he is wholly weaned from sense, and self, and sin, and wholly devoted in head, and heart, and hand, and habit, to the love, service, and glory of God.'†

It is at once our duty and our privilege to aim unceasingly at this. We are not indeed to expect absolute perfection in this life, for it can only be attained when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, but we are to aim at constant progress, at being perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect, and to wait in faith and patience for the time when Christ, who is our life shall appear, and when we also shall appear with Him in glory.

* Dean Alford, *in loc.*

† Alexander. *On the Intercessory Prayer.*

4. In the words which follow, St. Paul expresses his confidence that his prayer for the Thessalonians would be heard and answered. *Faithful is He that calleth you who also will do it.*

The faithfulness of God is indeed the highest ground of encouragement to us, for the work is His own, and we may be confident that He who has begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Christ.

He has said that His people shall be all righteous, that He will present them to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. Nay, He has given us great and precious promises for this end that we may plead them at His throne of grace, and through these be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust.

We have therefore every encouragement to pray for our sanctification, for God is faithful, and what He has promised He will perform,

what He has said He will do. He is watching over His people in His love, giving His angels charge concerning them, and He will not fail them nor forsake them, but will confirm them unto the end, that they may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let every true Christian then be of good courage, and adopting the language of faith and hope, let him say as the Psalmist did, 'As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.'*

* Since the above was written, a valuable little work has appeared on *Sanctification*, by the Rev. Canon Hoare, where the reader will find the subject clearly and judiciously discussed.—Hunt and Co.

XXIV.

CLOSING APPEAL AND SALUTATION.

VER. 25-28.—Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

THE Bible has been described as the most *Divine*, and yet the most *human* book. The most Divine because it is given by inspiration of God; and the most human, because the holy men by whom it was written, acted as perfectly free agents; and whilst preserved from all error, and favoured with immediate revelations from on high, they thought and wrote as men, acknowledging their own infirmities,

and identifying themselves with the ordinary circumstances of human life.

We are often struck with this in studying St. Paul's Epistles, and with the way in which he descends from the most exalted and super-human themes, to common things—to hints on subjects which appear to us of secondary importance; salutations to friends, and exhortations to the performance of daily duties.

In the Epistle before us, we have been solemnized by the authoritative manner in which this inspired man announces to us the hope of the blessed dead, and reveals to us the order of events in the day of the Lord. We have, moreover, heard his testimony as to the times and seasons; the sure and certain hope of the children of light, and the weighty words of Apostolic exhortation which follow; and after seeking to soar with him to these lofty themes, we find ourselves suddenly recalled to the reality of our present welfare, by the appeal which follows.

Brethren, pray for us. What! Did St. Paul need the prayers of his brethren? Did this Apostle of Jesus Christ, who had planted and watered so many Churches, who had confirmed his testimony by miracles and mighty works, and who was inspired, to indite the most invaluable epistles for the instruction of the Church in all ages—did he need the prayers of a few poor people at Thessalonica, who were labouring for their daily bread, and were of little importance in the estimation of their fellow-men?

It was even so; so powerful is the prayer of faith, and so sacred did he know the prayers of good men to be in the sight of God, that, deeply impressed with the value of the intercessions of his fellow Christians, he thus earnestly appealed for them as an appointed means of obtaining fresh supplies of grace and blessing from on high.

What a lesson is there for us here; and, more especially, what an encouragement for people to pray for their ministers, and to ask

for them the grace and strength which they so greatly need! There are probably few, if any, earnest and spiritually-minded ministers, who do not pray much for their people; but it is to be feared that the duty of praying for ministers is not so generally felt. There is in the minds of many persons a feeling that their ministers do not need their prayers; that God will Himself take care of them, and bless them in their labours.

This is a mistake, and it is contrary to the whole spirit of the New Testament, where we are continually reminded of the importance of intercessory prayer.

There is nothing that a faithful minister values more highly than the prayers of his people, for he knows such prayers to be according to the will of God, and that they have often brought upon himself and others a blessing from on high.

Many striking instances of this might be given, but one which came before the writer many years ago, deserves to be specially men-

tioned. A town in the north of England had been favoured with the ministry of a pious clergyman ; but on his death he was succeeded by a careless and worldly-minded young man, to the great sorrow of the religious portion of the parishioners. They met together for the purpose of considering what they ought to do, and they had almost resolved to invite some pious Nonconformist minister to come and settle amongst them, when it was suggested by one of their number that before taking this step, it might be right for them to meet together and to pray for their young minister. The proposal commended itself to them, and they did so.

They met to ask that God would be pleased to look upon their thoughtless young pastor, and give him a new heart and a right spirit. They had not long to wait for the answer to their petitions ; the Lord hearkened, and heard, and visited the young man's soul with the healthful spirit of His grace. He became a truly devoted minister, and not only

preached the Gospel to the joy of many hearts, but was instrumental in providing for that place other faithful labourers; for the population of the town having rapidly increased, it was divided into several parishes, and he had the satisfaction of securing a faithful minister for each of its Churches.

Such a case forcibly illustrates the efficacy of prayer, and reminds us, 'that men ought always to pray and not to faint.' It shows it to be the duty of pious men to pray for their ministers, and to present their fervent supplications to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into the harvest, and provide for His people pastors after His own heart, who both by their life and doctrine shall set forth His glory, and set forward the salvation of all men.

Having thus appealed for their prayers, St. Paul exhorts them to the exercise of unity and brotherly love amongst themselves. *Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.* This was an Eastern custom suited to a primitive state of

society, which is frequently referred to both in the old and new Testaments.

Like other things which were not wrong in themselves, it is recognized as lawful in the early Churches, and the pure and sanctified use of it is enjoined. It is easy, however, to see that as the Churches extended, and the number of professing Christians became very great, a practice of this kind would become objectionable, and it was no doubt for such reasons that it gradually fell into disuse. The spirit of the exhortation should, however, be carefully attended to, and mutual feelings of brotherly kindness cherished at all times. There are many opportunities afforded us for acts of Christian courtesy, and for showing consideration for the feelings of others, which testify to the reality of that spiritual affection which should link the members of the one great family to each other.

This, when duly attended to, is at once glorifying to God, and edifying to His people, whilst the neglect of this has proved griev-

ing to the Spirit of God, and a hindrance to the cause of true religion.

Let us be ready, in our respective positions, to make any sacrifice for the promotion of brotherly kindness and charity; and in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

This word of loving exhortation is followed by a striking adjuration, *I charge you, by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.* This is given so solemnly as to imply that there existed some special reason for it, and it may be that St. Paul had seen in the Thessalonian Church a disposition to regard such communications as intended rather for the pastors and teachers than for lay members of the Church.

It is also worthy of observation, that in the reference made to the Jews of Thessalonica in Acts xvii. 11, we are told that 'the Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the

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Scriptures daily whether these things were so.'

With the high commendation which St. Paul bestows on this Church, we can hardly suppose that this indisposition to search the Scriptures continued with the converts to Christianity, but however this may have been, he here distinctly tells them that the Epistle which he now addressed to them was intended not for their pastors and teachers only, but for every member of the Church ; he commands it to be read *to all the holy brethren.*

It is also remarkable that St. Paul should have addressed this solemn adjuration to the Thessalonian Church, because it was to the same Church that he afterwards announced the approaching apostasy, and the revelation of the man of sin ; for, as an inspired prophet, he probably foresaw how much the leaven which was then working would be assisted by the neglect of the Holy Scriptures, until it would end in their being wholly removed from the people.

A great German divine truly observes, that 'what Paul commands with an adjuration, Rome forbids with a curse;'* and this prohibition was not limited to the dark ages, but has been repeated in our own times. Thus, in 1816, Pope Pius VII. published a bull against Bible Societies, in which he affirms the circulation of the Holy Scriptures to be 'a crafty device, by which the very foundations of religion are undermined; a pestilence which must be remedied and abolished; snares prepared for men's everlasting ruin;' and he is pleased to add, that the 'Holy Scriptures when circulated in the vulgar tongue, have, through the temerity of men, produced more harm than good.'

Since the glorious Reformation it has been our high privilege in this country to possess the Holy Scriptures, to be permitted to study them in private, and to hear them publicly read in our Churches, for the instruction of all ranks and degrees of men.

* Bengel, *in loc.*

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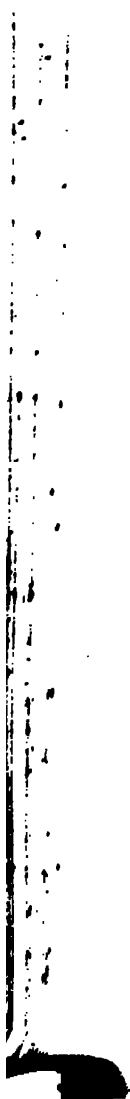
This public and systematic reading of the Word of God forms a chief glory of our national Church, and it becomes us to be very watchful in these times, lest, under a pretence of multiplying services for devotional exercises, and assembling for frequent 'celebrations,' as we now hear them called, the reading of the Bible become less appreciated, until it is gradually removed from the people.

Let us not forget the words of the great Head of the Church, 'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.'*

Having commenced the Epistle by wishing them grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle closes, as he was wont to do, by the like pious imprecation, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*

* Rev. iii. 11.

READINGS
ON
THE SECOND EPISTLE.



INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE Second Epistle to the Thessalonians appears to have been written at no great interval after the first, probably late in the year 53, or early in 54.

The subscription states that it was written from Athens, but this is not found in the most ancient manuscripts now extant, and it is generally admitted to be without authority.

The most approved opinion is that this epistle was written from Corinth where St. Paul abode a year and six months, and this view is confirmed by the fact that (as in the

First Epistle) he associates Silvanus and Timotheus with himself in the opening salutation.

We learn from the Acts of the Apostles (xviii. 5), that Silvanus and Timotheus rejoined the Apostle at Corinth, where they continued with him for some time, but it does not appear that they accompanied him on his leaving that city and sailing for Syria (xviii. 18), which renders it extremely probable that the Epistle was written whilst they remained together at Corinth.

The object of the Epistle may be very clearly gathered from its contents. It was to correct a mistake into which the Thessalonian Christians had fallen, of supposing the second advent of our Lord to be then imminent, and to impress upon them the importance of cherishing that blessed hope in a spirit of sobriety and patience; and of being on their guard against any unauthorized communication on the subject, professing to come from himself or his fellow-labourers.

In doing this, St. Paul makes a very im-

portant announcement to them. He reveals the fact that before the advent of our Lord a great declension from primitive faith and piety would take place, to be followed by the developement of an apostate power which he describes as *the man of sin*; and he gives them several particulars respecting that power, which the Lord would in due time consume with the spirit of His mouth, but which would only be destroyed by the brightness of His appearing.

The reader is reminded that the object of the present volume is not to discuss points of controversy, nor to enter upon the interpretation of prophecy, but to furnish brief practical comments for family reading.

It would be impossible, however, for any one to give an exposition of the second chapter of this Epistle without offering an opinion on the subject of this remarkable prophecy.

The author has endeavoured to do so as concisely as possible, and whatever may be

thought of the views advanced, they have not been hastily formed. His attention was directed to this subject more than forty years ago, and after reading much that has been written upon it, and hearing many discussions upon it, which have elicited views of an opposite kind, he finds himself confirmed in the impression that the Reformers of the sixteenth century were right in the views which they so generally, if not unanimously, entertained, that the prophecy of the man of sin has had its complete fulfilment in the Papacy.

The reader, who is disposed to enter more fully into this subject, is referred to the works of Bishop Jewel, and to the discourses of Manton on this Epistle. It will also be found discussed with great ability and learning in Elliott's *Horæ Apocalypticæ* (5th Ed.), vol. iii. pp. 93-103.

READINGS ON CHAPTER I.

I.

THANKSGIVING FOR GRACE CONFERRED.

CHAP. I. 1-4.—Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth ; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.

IN his Epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul says, 'To write the same things to you, to

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me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe;' and we have here an instance of his doing so, for he addresses the *Thessalonians* in the same words which he had used at the opening of his first Epistle.

As before, he associates with himself *Silvanus* and *Timotheus*, and addressing *the Church of the Thessalonians in God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*, he wishes them *grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Grace and peace! these are blessed words, and express things which are beyond all price. The Apostle felt it to be so; he evidently* loved to consider himself as a messenger of grace, an ambassador of peace, and it was this which made his feet so beautiful upon the mountains, and which gives such a charm to the records of his abundant and successful labours.

It is no small privilege to the ministers of religion to be, in their measure, messengers of grace to their fellow-men, and to be com-

missioned to address words of peace to the inhabitants of this sinful and rebellious world. It is happy for themselves when they feel this, when they are constrained by the love of Christ to testify to all around them of His power and willingness to save, and to beseech their fellow-sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. They are not ministers of wrath, but messengers of grace; and amidst personal infirmities, and the heaviness arising from manifold temptations, they should never forget the loving and gracious nature of that ministry of reconciliation which is intrusted to them.

This was once happily expressed in an address given by a distinguished moral philosopher* to a party of young men who were preparing for the ministry. Having reminded them of the sacred and responsible office on which they were about to enter, and of the high privilege of preaching the gospel of the grace of God, he added, 'And, oh, beware of

* The late Professor Wilson, of Edinburgh.

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casting your own dark shadows on
of glass which is before the throne

The 'dark shadows' are indeed
from poor human nature, but the
grace and peace should raise the
the earthen vessel beyond himself, a
him to realize 'that sea of glass
before the throne.'

The Apostle's salutation is im-
followed by thanksgiving to the G-
grace, the Father of all mercies, for
conferred on the Thessalonian Christ
says, *We are bound to give thanks a-*
you, brethren, as it is meet, because
faith groweth exceedingly, and the
of every one of you all toward ea-
aboundeth.

Faith and love are great gifts. N-
can be in a satisfactory state witho-
and where these are given and abou-
is cause for thanksgiving, even an
most trying external circumstances.
faith it is impossible to please God

is His appointment, for reasons unknown to us, that the just shall live by his faith, that during his earthly pilgrimage he shall fight the good fight of faith, and that, finally, he shall overcome by faith.

We must indeed distinguish carefully between the grace here referred to, and a mere assent of the mind to the truths of revealed religion; but where a living faith is given, where men are believing with the heart unto righteousness, where the reality of their faith is shown by fruitfulness in all good works, and where their steadfastness amidst outward trial and inward corruption shows them to be strong in faith giving glory to God, there is the clearest evidence of the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, and unbounded cause for thankfulness and praise.

Love is a sister grace, which is at once the first-fruit of the spirit of adoption, and the best preparation for the kingdom of heaven. We are told that 'whosoever loveth is born of God;' and we are thus led to the

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conclusion that where this grace is shed abroad in the heart, there the message of reconciliation has been gratefully received, and the natural enmity of the carnal mind has given place to feelings of holy reverence and love.

Their faith and love were growing exceedingly; and we cannot be surprised that he who had been instrumental in taking these natural branches from the wild olive-tree, and grafting them into the good olive-tree, was filled with thanksgiving as he saw the dark fruits of the flesh give place to the blessed fruits of the Spirit, to love, joy, peace, gentleness, brotherly-kindness, and charity.

And, so abundantly were these graces manifested in them, that St. Paul was able to mention them as an example to other churches, and to glorify God in them; he says, *We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.*

We are told that 'tribulation worketh pa-

tience;' it had done so in the case of the Thessalonians, and doubtless it is the Divine will that it should always do so, for it would seem that God is specially glorified in the meekness of His people under injury, and in their patient submission under protracted trial. Hence, the grace of patience was so remarkably exercised in Abraham, Job, and other eminent Scripture characters, who had a long waiting time mysteriously appointed for them, but who glorified God by possessing their souls in patience. We are to do so too, for we are called to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. We are to exercise this grace *individually*, and we are constantly called to do so amidst the stern realities of life, its strange vicissitudes, its bitter disappointments, its mysterious overshadowings. In all these circumstances it is the Divine will that patience should have its perfect work, and there is a special promise to those who keep the word of His patience, that they shall be preserved from the hour

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of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*

The Christian Church is to exercise this grace *collectively*, for she is waiting for her Lord, waiting for the Bridegroom's coming, and a long waiting time has she had—

Age after age hath gone,
Sun after sun has set,
And still in weeds of widowhood
She weeps a mourner yet.

In these circumstances, there is much need to remember the exhortation of St. James, 'Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.'†

When we consider the humble position of the Thessalonian Church at this time, with the fact that the graces found in it are thus

* Rev. iii. 10.

† James, v. 7, 8.

mentioned with approval in the New Testament, we are led to the conclusion that the gifts which are here referred to,—faith, love, patience, and steadfastness,—are of more real value than high mental endowments, however relatively important these may be.

We have indeed cause to be thankful for the intellectual endowments of such men as Luther and Calvin, Bacon and Newton, Butler and Edwards, Bengel and Chalmers, and many more who were favoured with mental gifts far above their fellows, and faithfully devoted them to the service of God, and to the defence and maintenance of the truth; but, on the other hand, we have seen in our own day some painful instances of the injury done by men of talent and of eloquence lending themselves to the countenance of error, and by their plausible sophistries misleading more simple and candid minds.

We are thankful for genius and eloquence, if we can have them consecrated to God and devoted to the cause of truth; but if not, we

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can do without them. We cannot, however, do without the gifts of faith and love, patience and meekness, for these are the true weapons of our warfare, which are not carnal but spiritual, and these have proved mighty, through God, to the promotion of His glory, the advancement of His kingdom, and the saving of souls.

When we think of the works of faith and the labours of love which have been accomplished through such instrumentality, we are reminded that it is written, NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY SPIRIT, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS.*

* Zech. iv. 6.

II.

THE PERSECUTORS AND THE PERSECUTED.

VER. 5-8.—Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It would solve many difficulties, reconcile us to many trials, and sustain us in seasons of suffering, could we look beyond the present to

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the future, and raise our thoughts from the things which are to the things which shall be hereafter. These are doubtless revealed to us for this end, that we may possess our souls in patience, knowing that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and assured that He will neither forsake His people, nor fail to avenge their cause upon those by whom they have been injured and oppressed.

1. In the piety and constancy of the suffering Christians at Thessalonica, St. Paul saw *manifest token* that there will be a righteous judgment hereafter, when the oppressors and persecutors of God's people shall receive at His hand the retribution which their deeds deserve. It were difficult otherwise to account for the fact that He to whom all power belongs should permit those who love and serve Him to be injured with impunity, whilst their persecutors frequently live and die in apparent ease and prosperity.

The Pagan persecutions of primitive times,

and the Papal persecutions of the middle ages, have never yet been fully recompensed by Almighty God. The woman who is described as drunken with the blood of saints and of the martyrs of Jesus Christ, is still arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked in gold and precious stones, and pearls; but it shall not be always so, a day of righteous retribution is at hand, and in one hour shall her judgment come.

Thus the righteousness of God shall hereafter be fully manifested in recompensing tribulation to all who have persecuted His saints, whilst the trials which they have inflicted will be shown to have been instrumental in making His people more and more worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they have also suffered.

Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!

2. But the righteous judgment here spoken of is reserved for the day *when the Lord Jesus*

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shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire; and we learn from this that the event which constituted the blessed hope of God's people, and which shall be their entrance on the long promised rest, shall also prove the time of righteous retribution to their adversaries, when He will avenge the blood of His saints, and execute upon them the judgment written; when He will take vengeance on them that know not God, and that have not obeyed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The language here used clearly implies that the persecutors have heaped up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath by the rejection of light, and the neglect of the gracious calls and invitations of the Gospel.

They know not God, but they might have known Him, for He has revealed Himself to us by His beloved Son, and has invited all men to be reconciled to Him through the blood of His Cross; to acquaint themselves with Him, and be at peace. *They have not obeyed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

but they might and ought to have obeyed it, for the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, has appeared unto all men; its calls and invitations are addressed to all; and we are assured that 'the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'

The neglect of opportunities so great, and the rejection of grace so abounding, must necessarily involve great guilt, and the punishment here threatened is nothing less than *everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.*

It is in vain that men seek to soften down, or to explain away, these words; the God of Truth would not have allowed His servant to employ them if they had not been strictly true, and needful to warn us of judgment to come, that knowing the terrors of the Lord we may persuade men.

It is clearly revealed that the Advent of our Lord shall be accompanied by the infliction of righteous judgment on those who have

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rejected the message of reconciliation, and on every power which has opposed the progress of His kingdom, and persecuted His true and faithful people.

3. And whilst St. Paul thus describes the doom which shall overtake the persecutors, he is careful to speak a word of comfort to the persecuted; he says *to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire.*

This is a blessed prospect, and it is most sure and certain, for the Scripture, which cannot be broken, saith that ‘there remaineth a rest for the people of God.’

This rest—this glorious rest—this keeping of an everlasting Sabbath, is frequently brought before us, both in the Old and New Testaments, sometimes by promise, sometimes by prophecy, and sometimes by types and symbols.

It was, doubtless, foreshadowed by the primeval rest, and it was typified by the rest

of Canaan, but it was not accomplished in either of these, for it still forms the subject of promise, and of the most sure and certain hope to the people of God. Hence St. Paul exhorts us to 'labour to enter into that rest.' And warned by the fate of Israel in the wilderness, to 'take heed lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

There is a present earnest of this rest which we should all seek to enjoy. Our Lord refers to it when He says, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' This inward rest the Lord Jesus bestows on the subjects of His kingdom, on those who believe and trust in Him. It is rest from the terrors of the law; rest from the guilt and burden of sin; rest from distracting doubts and fears. We should examine ourselves whether we have attained this rest, for it is undoubtedly intended for all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity;

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and it is a blessed support to us amidst the winds and waves of this troublesome world. If it be disturbed, through our own infirmity, or through manifold temptation, let us not feel satisfied till we can say, as the Psalmist did, 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.'

There is a further enjoyment of this rest upon which the souls of the righteous enter at death. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours,' and being delivered from the burden of the flesh they are in joy and felicity.

Several of the visions of the Apocalypse seem evidently intended to convey to us some idea of the rest enjoyed by the spirits of departed saints, and of the glory and blessedness upon which they have entered. Thus, in the fourth and fifth chapters they are described as surrounding the throne of God and of the Lamb, and engaged in singing a new song, saying, 'Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by

thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests ; and we shall reign on the earth.'

In the seventh chapter, St. John tells us that 'they stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' He further tells us that 'they shall hunger no more ; neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'

These and other passages were clearly intended to give us some idea of things above, and of the rest on which the souls of departed saints have entered.

These, however, fall short of the complete fulfilment of the promised rest, which is re-

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served for the time when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. Then shall death be swallowed up in victory, and the bodies of His saints shall be changed and made like unto His glorious body. Then, the sorrows and sufferings of this groaning, weary earth shall be for ever over, and He that sitteth on the throne shall make all things new; then the Lord Jesus shall present unto Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; and shall say to all who have confessed His Name among men, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

Oh, then it is that the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. And thus they shall enter on the full enjoyment of their long-promised, glorious, everlasting rest.

III.

THE GLORY THAT SHALL FOLLOW.

VER. 9, 10.—Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

THE Apostle has already foretold the doom of the persecutors in the day when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, and he now confirms what he had already said, by adding that *they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.*

That the second advent of our Lord will be preceded and accompanied by terrible judgments, is clearly revealed to us, and we already see the vials of His wrath consuming those apostate powers which have set themselves in opposition to His will, and have hindered the advancement of His kingdom. We are, moreover, informed that the mystical Babylon shall be suddenly destroyed, and that the powers symbolized by the Beast and the false Prophet, and the kings of the earth so long associated with them, are to be cast alive into the lake of fire before the era of blessedness is ushered in. We must then expect these things to come to pass, for they form the closing part of that great tribulation through which we must enter the kingdom of God; but it is good to look beyond these things, and to remember that that dark night in this world's history shall be followed by a glorious dawn, for it is then that *the Lord Jesus shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*

These are the great ends for which He comes, and they impress us with the greatness of His love towards His people, who are here described as the first objects of His care amidst the glories of that eventful day.

I. The Apostle tells us that *He shall come to be glorified in His saints*. It is true that He is already glorified in His saints,—in their love towards Him,—in their faith and patience,—in their bold confession of His Name,—in their holiness of life, and their fruitfulness in all good works; but this is only the earnest and foretaste of what is yet to follow.

He shall then be glorified in the *justifying righteousness* in which He presents them faultless before the throne. Let us seek to realize the innumerable multitude gathered from all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, which shall stand in that day before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands. Well may it be asked, 'What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?'

These were all conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, the children of wrath even as others; but behold the riches of redeeming grace,—they were pardoned through Christ's precious blood, justified by His righteousness, and accepted in Him. The wise of this world despised them, they ridiculed the idea of imputed righteousness, or of being justified from all things simply by faith in Christ; but now the wisdom and power of God are fully manifested, and the great reality is apparent to all men, that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, but that as far as east is distant from the west, so far hath He removed their transgressions from them.

He shall also be glorified in *the sanctifying righteousness* which He hath wrought in them. These had fallen wills to be subdued; evil passions and corrupt affections to contend against, but they shall then be presented unblameable in holiness, before God, even the Father. Men did not believe that any work of renewal was

going on within them, but it was so; for 'being made free from sin and become servants to God, they had their fruit unto holiness.' Though unperceived by men, the faithful Promiser was bestowing His Holy Spirit on them, writing His law in their hearts, and enabling them to die daily unto sin, and to live unto righteousness. And when He comes again they shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is; and it shall be manifest to angels and to men, that God's way is the way of holiness, and that His people have from the beginning been chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

The Lord Jesus shall, moreover, be glorified in *the consummation of their happiness both in body and soul.*

Then death shall be swallowed up in victory, and all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes. They shall appear in the likeness of their Lord; their mental powers increased and perfected; their bodies changed and fashioned

like unto His glorious body; and they who had once borne the image of the earthy shall now bear the image of the heavenly.

And thus when the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, shall return in glory to receive His people to Himself, He shall find them prepared for Him even as a Bride is adorned for her husband; and as He sees in them the travail of His soul, and beholds His moral image reflected in them, He shall be *glorified in His saints*, and the words of His intercessory prayer will receive their final and complete accomplishment, ‘All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.’

II. We are further told that when Christ shall come again to be glorified in His saints, *He shall be admired in all them that believe*. Various shades of meaning have been attached to these words by learned men: Tyndal translates them—‘He shall be made marvellous in all them that believe,’ and a distinguished critical writer paraphrases them thus, ‘That He might

be celebrated by all true Christians of whose happiness He is the author.' In other words, He shall be the object of boundless admiration and gratitude in the eyes of His assembled saints.

They shall admire the *love* displayed in their redemption. Even now, what a subject of praise and thanksgiving is redeeming love, and how many in all ages and in all lands have glorified God for His unspeakable gift. But whilst the love of Christ has so affected many hearts as to constrain them to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, much imperfection has mingled with the sacrifice of praise, and we cannot fully comprehend the breadth and length, the depth and height, of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Then, however, it shall be far otherwise, for with renewed faculties and powers they shall contemplate the love of Christ; and as they behold the Lamb that was slain, they shall join with rapture in that glorious anthem, 'Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in

His own blood ; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

They shall admire the *wisdom* which has been displayed in all His dispensations ; for the redemption of our race is the grand manifestation of the Divine wisdom, and they who receive and believe in Him know that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We are told that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, and doubtless these exalted intelligences see far more than we are at present able to do ; but we are being taught and disciplined in the School of Christ, and the time will soon arrive when we shall see no more as through a glass darkly, but face to face, and then shall we perceive and admire and glorify God for the wisdom that has been hidden in Christ, which has been revealed to us by His Spirit, and which shall be hereafter fully displayed.

And then shall the unchanging *faithfulness* and *truth* of their great High-Priest be the source of boundless admiration to His people. At present there is much that is mysterious in the Lord's dealings with His servants, for His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out; and passing through the furnace of affliction, many a suffering saint has been ready to say with Job, 'Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.' But then shall the mystery of God be finished, and every part of His wondrous plan shall be made known, and the many sons who have been brought to glory shall acknowledge and admire the operations of His hand, in all the way wherein He led them in the wilderness.

Oh, let us seek to anticipate the day when the Lord Jesus shall come again to be 'glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe,' and let us give diligence to make our calling and election sure, that, believing with the heart unto righteousness, and making con-

cession with the mouth unto salvation, we may have the fullest evidence that we are His, and that we shall be openly acknowledged by Him in the day of His appearing.

And, how happy must St. Paul have felt in being able to add, *because our testimony among you was believed*; for it had been his privilege to testify amongst them the gospel of the grace of God, and they had received his testimony, and had believed to the saving of their souls. Under the influence of this precious faith they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven,—to wait for the happy time when grace shall be consummated in glory.

The preaching of the Gospel is a constant testimony to the grace of the Lord Jesus,—to His finished work,—to His power and willingness to save; and it is a source of unspeakable thankfulness when, through the testimony of His servants, men are led to Him in whom all blessings for time and for eternity are to be

found, and are so rooted and built up in Him, as to have the holy and blessed confidence that 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.'

IV.

A PRAYER FOR THE SUFFERING SAINTS.

VER. 11, 12.—Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

HAVING raised the faith and hope of the Thessalonian Christians to the time when the Lord Jesus shall come again to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, St. Paul pours forth his prayer on their behalf, and he tells them what were the blessings which he desired for them.

I. He prays *that God would count them worthy of this calling.* The calling was to be partakers of the glory that shall be revealed, and for this he prays that the Lord would count them meet,—meet to stand before the Son of man,—meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

That it shall be so with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity there is every reason to expect, for He giveth grace and glory, and He has undertaken to perfect that which concerneth them; but we are not on this account to neglect the means which He Himself has been pleased to appoint, for it is through such means, as effectual fervent prayer, that His people shall be sustained in their great conflict, and in the end counted worthy of this calling.

So far then from the sure and certain hope of future glory rendering us indifferent to prayer, it should produce the opposite effect, and the blessings which the Apostle here asks for the suffering saints at Thessalonica, we

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should ask for ourselves under all circumstances and at all times.

II. St. Paul further prays that *the Lord would fulfil in them all the good pleasure of His goodness.* His purpose in His people is one of infinite goodness ; He would deliver them from evil, purify their hearts by faith, subdue their wills, and make them a peculiar people zealous of good works. Nay, He would have them to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, and so replenish them with His heavenly grace, that they might at all times be living epistles known and read of all men. But, alas ! how often are His thoughts to us-ward hindered through our manifold infirmities, through the influence of the world, and by the fiery darts of the wicked one. How often are we straitened in ourselves, and tempted so to act as to grieve the Holy Spirit of God ! Is it right that we who profess and call ourselves Christians should be satisfied thus to come far short of His glory ? Is it not rather meet that we should adopt for ourselves the petition which

St. Paul here urges for the Thessalonians, and pray that Almighty God would fulfil in us all the good pleasure of His goodness ?

What might not God's people become through the instrumentality of such prayers? How holy and unblameable! how heavenly-minded and separated from the world!—a people of whom men might take knowledge that they have been with Jesus, and that the Lord is fulfilling in them the good pleasure of His goodness!

The Lord grant such an effusion of His Holy Spirit in these last times that it may be so with all who love Him,—and that whatever may be the trials appointed for them,—the tribulation through which they must enter the kingdom of God, they may be a holy people, a people abounding in love, full of goodness, and having their conversation in heaven, from whence they are looking for their Lord!

III. The Apostle further prays that *the work of faith* may be fulfilled in them *with power*. The work of true religion in the soul is ex-

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phatically the work of faith, and it is God's will that faith should be accompanied and exercised with power. If our faith is weak, we should not be satisfied to have it continue so, but earnestly seek to have it increased, for our calling is to be strong in faith, giving glory to God. We have many examples given us in the Holy Scriptures of the power which should accompany the work of faith, and of the victory which it gives to the people of God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of those who 'through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.'*

In these instances we see the work of faith with power sustaining and supporting those who, suppressing all temptation to unbelief, yielded themselves to its blessed influence, and

* Heb. xi. 33, 34.

making them more than conquerors through Him who loved them.

With encouragements so great, let every true Christian pray for an increase of faith, and continue instant in prayer, that He who has appointed faith to be the grace through which all spiritual blessings are to be received may be pleased to accompany it with power, to the glory of His Name, and to the complete fulfilment of His will concerning us.

And let us examine ourselves as to the power which faith is exercising over us, and inquire whether it is raising us above the dominion of sin, and especially of those sins which do most easily beset us. We are assured that sin shall not have dominion over us, and although there is no absolute perfection to be attained in this life, it is clearly God's will that the work of faith shall be accompanied by such power as shall raise His people from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, enable them continually to mortify all evil and corrupt

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affections, and strengthen them to walk in all virtue and godliness of living.

IV. Having poured forth these petitions on their behalf, this faithful servant points to the great end which he kept continually before him, *that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in Him.*

In comparison with this, everything else was, in his estimation, insignificant; and he sought not for them present ease, nor exemption from trial, nor worldly wealth or honour; but that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in the bold confession of their faith, their godliness of living, and their persevering efforts to make known to others the Gospel of His grace.

This is indeed the great end to be kept before us all, that in the firmness of our faith, the ardour of our love, and the consistent tenor of our lives, the name of the Lord Jesus may be glorified, and the words of His intercessory prayer fulfilled in us, 'All mine are

thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.'

There can be no higher motive than this, and they who rightly cherish it cannot fail to experience its sanctifying influence, nor will they cease to pray that they may never be so left to themselves as to bring reproach or dishonour on the Christian profession, but that they may be strengthened by Divine grace so to live and act that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in them.

And, if Christ be glorified in His people now, it is preparatory to their being glorified in Him hereafter, in the long-looked-for day when He will come again in power and glory, and when He will confess the names of all who have ever loved and served Him, before His Father and before the angels.

The Lord enable us to set this blessed hope before us, and daily to live under its sanctifying influence and power!

V.

AN EARNEST APPEAL.

CHAP. II. 1, 2.—Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him,

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

THE weakness of the human mind is often shown by its inability to grasp the whole counsel of God, and by a tendency to give undue prominence to some particular portion of revealed truth.

This has frequently been displayed in connexion with the study of prophecy, and in

reference to the second advent of our Lord, that blessed hope which is set before us, and which should ever be cherished in patience and sobriety by His people.

In his first Epistle to this Church, St. Paul had dwelt much upon this subject, appealing to it as a source of consolation to the bereaved, and announcing the order of events in that day when 'the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God;' but it seems that they so far misapprehended his meaning, as to have supposed that the appearing of the Lord was then imminent, and that this had the effect of unsettling their minds and rendering them unfit for the discharge of daily duties.

This called forth the Apostle's present earnest appeal, and it is important to observe that so far from reproving them for making the second advent of our Lord the object of their hope, he introduces his present appeal by a pointed reference to that great event,

using it as an argument to enforce his exhortation. He says, *Now, we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him.*

In contemplating the event itself then, and in giving it a prominent place in their thoughts the Thessalonians had made no mistake. It was meet and right so to do ; but they were mistaken in supposing that it must necessarily be close at hand, and in forgetting that certain great intervening events had been foretold.

The same mistake has been repeatedly made in later times ; especially when the study of prophecy has been revived after having been neglected for a time ; but mistakes arising from human infirmity can make no change in the place assigned by Divine wisdom to the event itself, or in the importance of setting our hearts' best affections upon it. We cannot live under a holier or more sanctifying influence ; we cannot die with a brighter or more blessed hope.

We have, however, much reason to take

heed lest we be betrayed into any extravagance unworthy of the Gospel, and calculated to bring reproach upon our Christian profession ; in this, as in all things, we have need to be sober and watch unto prayer.

It was right that the Thessalonians should love the appearing of their Lord, dwell upon it, and cherish it as the object of their hope, but they were wrong in supposing it to be so near at hand, and in allowing themselves to be excited upon the subject. Hence the necessity for this appeal, *We beseech you, brethren . . . that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.*

They were not to give heed to any pretended revelation professing to come from the Spirit of God, nor to any oral testimony said to be given by inspired persons, nor to any letter supposed to be written by himself, or by his fellow-apostles.

It is humiliating to reflect that such dangers

existed in a Church so recently planted, and that so solemn a warning was already necessary. As we read the Apostle's words, we are ready to exclaim, Is it possible that whilst the Holy Spirit was present in His miraculous power in the Churches, seducing spirits would venture to oppose and hinder His work by leading professing Christians into error and delusion? Whilst the inspired apostles were yet watering the Churches which they had planted, can we imagine that false teachers would be so bold as to present themselves, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them?

Whilst St. Paul was yet inditing his invaluable epistles to the Churches, is it conceivable that men would counterfeit these epistles for the purpose of deceiving and perplexing the first converts to Christianity?

It was even so, and the fact that it was so should prepare us to expect trials of this kind, whilst it should save us from feeling depressed and disappointed when such evils arise.

On this subject, and with special reference to His second advent, our Lord has given us a remarkable warning in His prophecy on the Mount of Olives, where He says, 'If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.'*

With such warnings as these, we have no right to expect that the Church of the last days shall be exempt from trials which perplexed and harassed the Church of the primitive age. On the contrary, we are told that 'in the last days perilous times shall come,'

* Matt. xxiv. 23-27.

from which we may infer that they will prove to be specially so compared with former times, and that we shall have need to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation.

The Lord enable us to have these things in remembrance, and to follow the counsel of St. Jude, when, having given warning of these same evil days, he adds, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

It is by such means as these that we shall be prepared for the Lord's appearing and kingdom, and in cherishing that blessed hope we should carefully avoid any carnal excitement in connexion with it, lest we bring a subject so sacred into contempt, and give occasion to the adversaries of religion to blaspheme.

Good men are sometimes betrayed into extravagance on these points from a conscious-

ness of sincerity, and of their being uninfluenced by any selfish or worldly motive; but they forget that it is for such our great adversary lays his snares, and that he gains an important advantage if he can drive into error or excitement those whom he has in vain endeavoured to send back into the world.

Let us, with one heart, and with one soul, love the appearing of our Lord, and keep it always before us as 'the bright and morning star;' but let us possess our souls in patience, holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, abounding in every good word and work, and seeking faithfully to discharge the duties of our calling, remembering for our comfort the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing.'

VI.

A GREAT APOSTASY FORETOLD.

VER. 3.—Let no man deceive you by any means :
for that day shall not come, except there come a
falling away first, and that man of sin be re-
vealed, the son of perdition.

HAVING earnestly besought the Thessalonians by the hope which was so dear to them,—the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him,—to maintain Christian sobriety, and not to allow themselves to be deceived by any persons who might affirm the day of Christ to be at hand, St. Paul proceeds to warn them of certain events which must intervene, for which they should be prepared, and concerning which it was right

that they should possess their souls in patience.

I. He foretells a great apostasy,—a falling away from primitive faith and piety,—a declension from their first love, which would be so general amongst professing Christians, as to prove a crisis in the history of the universal Church.

That such a falling away did take place is but too easily proved, and we have only to compare the history of the first three centuries with that of the centuries which followed, to see how literally the words of the Apostle were fulfilled.


The first three centuries were times of great tribulation, when it was indeed given unto Christ's people not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. Then it was that the Church passed through ten pagan persecutions in rapid succession; but the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the Church, and Christianity was rapidly spread throughout the world. In those days the Spirit

of glory and of God rested on His servants, and they showed themselves to be men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

Then arose those great men,—Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, and many more,—men of whom the world was not worthy, but who were strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, living lives of true devotedness to Him, and most of them sealing their testimony with their blood.

Nor was the voice of these faithful witnesses raised in vain, for the progress of Christianity was truly wonderful, and churches were planted everywhere throughout the Roman empire, and far beyond its limits.

. A great change, however, was at hand ; early in the fourth century, the Emperor Constantine embraced the Christian faith, and Christianity became the established religion of his vast dominions. The once persecuted bishops and pastors of the Church were raised to positions of respectability and honour, and the



profession of Christianity was no longer attended with personal danger and suffering. The usual effect of prosperity soon followed,—a spirit of lukewarmness prevailed, and between worldly ambition on the one hand, and the withering influence of the Arian heresy on the other, the falling away predicted by St. Paul was fully accomplished.

Chrysostom, who lived in the fifth century, draws a striking contrast between the purity of the primitive Church and the defection of the Church of his own time. Of the former, he says, ‘Verily the Church then was a heaven, the Spirit of God ordering all things, and directing all the heads of the Church, but of the latter, he observes, ‘The Church which is now, may be likened to a woman which hath forsaken her wonted modesty, and hath only certain outward shows of that first felicity, and keepeth still the hutches and boxes of precious things, but lacketh the treasure which was in them.’*

* Chrysostom’s 36 Hom. on 1 Cor.

Truly does a pious old writer observe, ‘ We need to be exactly careful to keep close to the doctrine, worship, and discipline of the first gospel Church ; for if these had remained pure, Antichrist had never risen ; Christ’s institutions would have preserved His interests in the world. But as these were corrupted, the apostasy prevailed. When the faith of the Gospel was turned into dead opinions and curious questions ; and the worship of the Gospel was corrupted by giving Divine honour to saints and angels, and turned into a theatrical pomp, and the pageantry of empty ceremonies . . . then, certainly, there was an apostasy or defection from Christ.’†

II. Having thus given warning of a very general declension or falling away that would occur amongst professing Christians, St. Paul proceeds to speak of a great antichristian power which would arise, and which he describes as *that man of sin, the son of perdition*.

These are formidable titles, the former being

* Manton on 2 Thess. ii.

evidently suggested by the name given by the Jews to Antiochus Epiphanes,* and the latter by that appropriated to the traitor Judas, who was pre-eminently the son of perdition. We are thus guided to two leading and distinctive features to be expected in this apostate power, for as the Jews spoke of Antiochus as the man of sin because he was not only their bitter persecutor, but had profaned the Temple of God, and sought to introduce idolatrous worship; and as Judas, himself an apostle, betrayed the Son of Man with a kiss, so we are led to the conclusion that the antichristian power here foretold would seek to alter the pure and scriptural worship of God, and that he would betray the cause of Christ, whilst professing to serve and honour Him.

From the fact of the antichristian power being here described as 'the man of sin,' many persons have supposed that Antichrist must necessarily be an individual; but this mistake arises from forgetting that in prophecy it is

* 1 Maccab. ii. 48.

not uncommon to describe a succession of persons in this manner. Thus, when the prophet Daniel speaks of the king of the north and the king of the south, he describes by these titles a long succession of the kings of Syria and Egypt. And thus again, when St. John describes the apostate Church as the woman seated on the beast, he has never been supposed by any class of interpreters to refer to an individual woman.

A careful attention to the structure of the prophecy before us, seems, moreover, to be sufficient to satisfy us that the reference must be to a succession of persons, and not to an individual, for the man of sin was to appear on the falling away having taken place, and he was to continue till the appearing of our Lord in glory.

Nor is there much difficulty in determining the character in which this predicted power is to be found, for we learn from Church history that the declension from primitive piety and spirituality was speedily followed

by the lofty pretensions put forth by the Bishop of Rome, and by his claim to spiritual and temporal supremacy, whilst the degraded private character and acknowledged immoralities of too many of the occupants of the papal chair, fully justify the appellation of 'the man of sin,' which is here employed.

The statements of eminent Roman Catholic writers seem to be conclusive on this subject, and we would invite any candid inquirer to consult such works as Cardinal Baronius' *Ecclesiastical Annals*,* or Platina's *Lives of the Popes*, and to ask himself if he can come to any other conclusion than that arrived at by the Reformers of the sixteenth century, who were unanimous in the belief that the Pope is the man of sin, and that Rome is the Babylon of the Apocalypse.

A distinguished American writer who has carefully studied this prophecy, gives the following summary of his conclusions respecting

* Extracts from the writings of Baronius, Platina, and Du Pin, will be found in the Appendix, A, B, and C.

it. Referring to the general character of the Popes, and the enormous crimes of which they have been guilty, he says, ‘Pope Vagilius waded to the pontifical throne through the blood of his predecessor. Pope Joan (Roman Catholic writers tell us) was a female in disguise, elected and confirmed Pope as John VIII. . . . Pope Marcellinus sacrificed to idols. Concerning Pope Honorius the Council of Constance decreed, “We have caused Honorius, the late Pope of old Rome, to be *accursed*; for that in all things he followeth the mind of Sergius the *heretic*, and hath confirmed his wicked doctrines.”

‘The Council of Basle thus condemns Pope Eugenius: “We condemn and depose Pope Eugenius, a despiser of the holy canons; a disturber of the peace and unity of the Church of God; a notorious offender of the whole universal Church; a Simonist, a perjurer, a man incorrigible, a schismatic, a man fallen from the faith, and a wilful heretic. . . .” Pope John XIII. usurped the Pontificate,

spent his time in hunting, in lasciviousness, and monstrous forms of vice ; he fled from the trial to which he was summoned, and was stabbed, being taken in the act of adultery. . . . Pope Alexander VI. is described by a Roman Catholic historian as "one of the greatest and most horrible monsters that could scandalize the holy chair."

The conclusion at which this eminent commentator arrives, is this, that 'to no succession of men who have ever lived, could the appellation "*the man of sin*," be applied with so much propriety as to this succession.'*

It had been well for the interests of mankind if the Christian Church had duly considered this warning, and looked for the development of this apostate power at the time and under the circumstances described by St. Paul. If they had done so, the bishops and pastors of Western Europe had been on their guard against the encroachments of the Roman Pontiff, and instead of submissively lending them-

* Barnes, *in loc.*

selves to promote his ambitious designs, they might have successfully resisted him ; but alas ! the falling away had come, and amidst a vast increase of external observances and ritualistic superstitions, their faith was almost gone, and the ardour of their religious affections was chilled, so that they turned not to that more sure word of prophecy whereunto we do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.

Blinded by patristic tradition, the Word of God had become to them as a sealed book, and so they wandered from the paths of truth and righteousness until darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.

Thanks be unto God who has said once more, *Let there be light* ; and has sent forth His Word to ‘prophesy again before many people, and nations, and tongues, and kings.’*

* Rev. x. 11.

VII.

THE MAN OF SIN DESCRIBED.

VER. 4.—Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

HAVING warned the Thessalonians that the great apostasy from primitive faith and piety would be followed by the revelation of a power which he describes as ‘that man of sin, the son of perdition,’ the Apostle proceeds to give a further delineation of this power in its pride and arrogance, and in its blasphemous assumption of the honour which is due to Almighty God alone.

I. He tells us that he would *oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.*

The man of sin would *oppose*; this was to form a prominent feature in his character, and we have only to continue our inquiries in the same direction to find the exact fulfilment of what is here described. The Pope has proved the great opponent to all that our blessed Lord commanded His followers to observe. He has opposed the preaching of the Gospel, the reading and circulation of the Holy Scriptures, the exercise of private judgment, and the administration of the Lord's Supper in the manner in which our Lord instituted and ordained it.

His opposition to God's saints is stamped on the pages of history in letters of blood, for terrible indeed are the records which we possess of the persecutions inflicted by the Papacy on the Waldenses and Albigenses, the Lollards and Huguenots, and on many more whose desire was simply to follow Christ, and to take His word as the sole rule of their faith and practice.

The Pope has also *exalted himself above all*

that is called God, or that is worshipped. He has not only claimed supremacy over all bishops and pastors, but over all kings and rulers, 'deposing some and advancing others, obliging them to prostrate themselves before him, to kiss his toe, to hold his stirrup, to wait barefooted at his gate, treading even upon their neck, and kicking off the imperial crown with his foot.'*

It is happily true that he has no longer the power to carry out these lofty pretensions; but the disposition to do so remains unimpaired, and on a recent occasion the Pope's claim to supremacy was stated in the following terms by his chief representative in England:

'I acknowledge no civil power; I am the subject of no prince; and I claim more than this, I claim to be the supreme judge and director of the consciences of men, of the peasant that tills the fields, and of the prince that sits upon the throne; of the household that live in the shade of privacy, and the legislator

* See Bishop Newton on this prophecy.

that makes laws for the kingdoms. *I am the sole, last, supreme judge of what is right and wrong.*'*

This indeed is the language of one who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, but even this falls short of the statements of the Canon Law, where it is affirmed of the Bishop of Rome that 'forasmuch as he is called God, he may be judged of no man, for God may be judged of no man.'†

II. The Apostle further indicates the direction in which the man of sin would be found, for he adds, that *he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*. This seems clearly to point to the Christian Church, and to have been a warning to the early Christians to expect Antichrist to arise, not from without, but from within.

Some devout students of prophecy have

* Dr. Manning's Sermon, Oct. 9, 1864.

† Some of Archbishop Cranmer's extracts from the Canon Law will be found in the Appendix.

thought differently: they have maintained that this must refer to the Temple of Jerusalem, but they forget that before these words were written, the Temple at Jerusalem had ceased to be the temple of God, and that it was in a little while wholly destroyed. Others have maintained that the Man of Sin is yet to be revealed; that he will arise amongst the Jews, and will claim divine honours in a temple to be built at Jerusalem by unbelieving Jews, who shall have returned to Palestine through some political movement, before the conversion of the Jews to Christianity and their national restoration to the land. With every respect for those who have advocated this view, it is difficult to understand how it can be seriously entertained, for it must be obvious to any unprejudiced mind that a temple to be built by infidel Jews would never be described by St. Paul as *the Temple of God*.

But, we have the authority of St. Paul himself for applying the word *Temple* in a figurative sense to the Christian Church. He

does so in such passages as these, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God;'^{*} 'The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are;'[†] 'Ye are the temple of the living God.'[‡]

We understand then that he points to the Christian Church, not indeed, to any particular edifice or building, but to the great body of professing Christians; and he warns us that within its pale, that is to say, within the company of those who profess and call themselves Christians, the man of sin would be revealed, and would usurp the place and authority which belong to God alone.

Now, this is precisely what has occurred, and to be convinced that such a power as this described by St. Paul, has arisen within the Christian Church, we have only to turn to the Canon Law, which affirms that 'the Bishop of Rome hath authority to judge all men, and specially to judge the articles of faith, and that without any councils; and may assoil (acquit) them that the Council hath

^{*} 1 Cor. iii. 16. [†] 1 Cor. iii. 17. [‡] 2 Cor. vi. 16.

damned ; but no man hath authority to judge him, nor to meddle with anything that he hath judged, neither emperor, king, people, nor clergy ; and it is not lawful for any man to dispute his power.*

Not only so, but he has allowed himself to be addressed as ‘our Lord God the Pope ; another God upon earth ; King of kings, and Lord of lords,’ whilst Roman Catholic writers have stated, without any papal reproof, that ‘the power of the Pope is greater than all created power, and extends itself to things celestial, terrestrial, and infernal. The Pope doeth whatsoever he listeth, even things unlawful, and is more than God.’ †

And, although, as has been already stated, this prophecy refers to the body of professing Christians rather than to any particular place of worship, yet there are certain occasions when their pretensions come prominently forth in connexion with Roman Catholic worship.

* See Appendix E.

† See Bishop Newton on Prophecies, chap. xxii.

Such an occasion is 'the adoration of the Pope,' which takes place immediately on his election, when he is placed on a chair on the altar of the Sistine Chapel, and there receives the homage of the Cardinals; which ceremony is again repeated on the high altar of St. Peter's.

Referring to this ceremony, a candid English Roman Catholic priest, who witnessed it at Rome, makes the following observations: 'Now, in this piece of pageantry, I object not to the word *adoration* . . . Nor do I find fault with the throne; he who is at the same time both Pontiff and Prince, has from time and custom, perhaps, a double title to such a distinction. But why should the altar be made his footstool? The altar, *the beauty of holiness*, the throne of *the victim Lamb*, the mercy-seat of the temple of Christianity; why should the altar be converted into the footstool of a mortal?'

Such were the feelings produced on the

* *A Tour through Italy*, by the Rev. C. J. Eustace.

mind of a candid Roman Catholic by 'the adoration of the Pope;' and it is difficult to understand how any persons can witness this ceremony without seeing in it the literal fulfilment of the prophecy of St. Paul, or without being filled with holy dread of that system of blasphemy and impiety which culminates in a ceremony so dishonouring to Almighty God, and so characteristic of *that man of sin, the son of perdition, who sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

May it please God to open the eyes of many earnest and devout Roman Catholics to see this, and to remember that it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'

We have no doubt that amidst all the errors of the Church of Rome, and the blasphemous pretensions of her Pontiffs, there are many good men within her pale, who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in Him, although they have not the light nor the moral courage to separate themselves from her communion.

We earnestly pray for such, that they may be kept from all that is blasphemous and idolatrous, and that ere the hour of her judgment shall come, when the righteous God shall remember her iniquities, they may hear and respond to the voice from heaven which says, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues!'

* Rev. xviii. 4.

VIII.

THE HINDRANCE AND ITS REMOVAL.

VER. 5-8.—Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.

HAVING proceeded thus far in this wonderful prophecy, St. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had already spoken to them on this subject during his ministry amongst them.

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He says, *Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things?*

He had not only done so; he had orally instructed them concerning a power then in existence, which was the hindrance to the development of the man of sin, and on the removal of which he would be revealed; and he reminds them of the fact in these words, *And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way.*

I. We have here, then, a further statement by which to test the accuracy of the interpretation already given, and it is important to inquire what this part of the prophecy led the early Christians to expect, and whether the progress of events has justified their expectations.

A few extracts from their writings will show that they *generally* considered the Roman Imperial power to be that which hindered; and

that on its removal the man of sin would be revealed.

Tertullian, who wrote in the second century, says, 'Who can this be but the Roman State, the division of which into ten kingdoms will bring on Antichrist, and then the wicked one shall be revealed?'

And in his *Apology*, exhorting the early Christians to pray for the Emperor, he says, 'There is still another and greater necessity that we should pray for the emperors . . . because we know it is by these the greatest calamity awaiting the whole world is withheld.'

Justin Martyr in the second century, and *Origen* in the third, both interpreted this passage as referring to Antichrist, and as identical with the 'little horn' described in Daniel's vision of the four great empires.

Cyril of Jerusalem says, 'The predicted Antichrist will come when the time of the Roman Empire shall be fulfilled.'

Augustin, in his great work, *The City of*

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*God,** says, 'No one questions that the Apostle spake these things concerning Antichrist, and the day of judgment should not come except Antichrist came first. *And now ye know what withholdeth*, some think this was spoken of the Roman Emperor, and therefore the Apostle was not willing to write it openly, lest he should incur a *præmunire*, and be falsely accused of wishing ill to the Roman Empire, which was hoped to be eternal.'

Chrysostom says, 'When the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come; and it is very likely, for as long as the dread of this Empire shall remain, no one shall quickly be substituted; but when it shall be dissolved, he shall seize upon the vacant empire, and endeavour to assume the power both of God and man.'

These passages, to which numerous additions might be made, are sufficient to show what some of the most learned of the early Fathers expected. As to the unanimous con-

* Book **xx.** chap. 19.

sent of the Fathers, on this, or on any other subject, there is no such thing, for there were as many different opinions amongst them as there are amongst modern divines. The above extracts may, however, be received as expressing the view which was generally entertained by the most approved writers in early times.

II. We now turn to history, and inquire if the course of events has justified the anticipations thus formed.

It has done so in a remarkable degree; the seat of government having been transferred from Rome to Byzantium, and the fall of the Western Empire following early in the fifth century, the ten kingdoms foretold by Daniel soon began to be developed, and the Bishop of Rome availed himself of the disorganized state of affairs to claim for himself temporal as well as spiritual power. On this point it may be well to give the testimony of the eminent Roman Catholic historian, Machiavelli, who makes the following statement: 'The Emperor of Rome, quitting Rome to dwell

at Constantinople, the Roman Empire began to decline, but the Church of Rome augmented as fast. Nevertheless, until the coming in of the Lombards, all Italy being under the dominion of either emperors or kings, the bishops assumed no more power than was due to their doctrine and manners; in civil affairs they were subject to the civil power. Theodoric, King of the Goths, fixing his seat at Ravenna, was that which advanced their interest and made them more considerable in Italy; for there being no other prince left in Rome, the Romans were obliged, for protection, to pay greater allegiance to the Pope. The Lombards having invaded and reduced Italy into several cantons, the Pope took the opportunity, and began to lift up his head.*

We find then that St. Paul intimated to the Thessalonians that the mystery of iniquity was already at work, but that the rise of the man of sin was restrained by an existing

* *History of Florence*, Book i., p. 6, English Translation.

power, known to themselves, which hindered, and on the removal of which he would be fully developed. We also find that the early Fathers understood the restraining power to be the Roman Emperor, and expected that on the fall of the Empire, the man of sin would be revealed; whilst history informs us that on the removal of the seat of Empire from Rome to Constantinople, the Bishop of Rome began to lift up his head, and availed himself of the state of public affairs to claim temporal as well as spiritual power.

There is thus the most perfect harmony between the details of the prophecy, the view which was entertained of it by the early Fathers, and the course of historical events.

III. The Apostle having thus given warning that the mystery of iniquity already working amongst professing Christians, would be fully developed in the man of sin, proceeds to affirm that *the Lord would consume this apostate power by the spirit of His mouth, and*

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ultimately destroy him by the brightness of His coming.

We turn again to history, and we find that ever since the glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Lord has been permitting the power of the Papacy to be consumed, through the faithful preaching of His Word, accompanied by the gracious operations of His Spirit.

It has been so in our own favoured country; and it has been so in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and other countries, where the word of the Lord has had free course, and been glorified in delivering many from error and superstition, and in bringing them to the light and liberty of the Gospel.

But the Papacy itself is not destroyed, and shall not be destroyed until the appearing of our Lord in glory; and here we have another point by which we may test the accuracy of the interpretation given, for where shall we find any two powers answering to this de-

scription save the Roman Imperial power and the Papacy ?

This is a point of great importance, and it seems to be overlooked by those who maintain that the man of sin has not yet appeared. In exposing this mistake, a late eminent controversial divine says, 'The Apostle speaks to the Thessalonians of a power which they knew of, and which existed at the time he wrote, and was to continue to exist until it was taken out of the way, and then *the man of sin* was to be revealed ; now, if the man of sin be not yet revealed, then there existed some power known to the Thessalonians in that day, which has continued to exist through all ages since, which must be in existence at this moment, and must continue to exist . . . Now, I believe there is no man who will profess to say that he can point out the existence of any power known to the Thessalonians which exists to this day ; but if no such power exists, then it follows, that whatever it was, when it was taken out of the

way, then was the man of sin to be revealed. Therefore, if that power is taken out of the way, it is quite clear that the man of sin must have appeared; and if the opinion entertained by the ancient Church was correct, that this power was the Roman Empire, and that after the then existing Empire was overthrown, the Antichrist was to be revealed in the man of sin, the spiritual power set up at Rome; then the application is plain and easy to be understood, and the Pope stands revealed in his own proper character.*

This argument seems to be unanswerable. Not only so, it exposes another fallacy connected with this subject. There are some who admit that this prophecy has had a primary fulfilment in the Papacy, but who tell us that they expect the Papacy to be succeeded by an infidel power, which will prove to be the man of sin in a still more literal sense, and will continue till our Lord appears. Now

* Rev. R. J. M'Ghee's Preface to Manton on 2 Thess. ii.

it is obvious that there is no room in the prophecy for a future infidel power, for if the Papacy is the man of sin at all, it is not to be destroyed until the second coming of our Lord.

The interpretation given must therefore be wholly right, or it must be wholly wrong; and there are the strongest reasons for believing that it is wholly right, and that we have in the Papacy the full development of the man of sin.

May the Lord teach Protestants to beware of trifling with this apostate power, the final judgment of which cannot be very far distant; and may He open the eyes of many Roman Catholics to see their 'infallible' Pope in his true colours, and to turn in all simplicity and sincerity to the Lord Jesus who is the only Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

IX.

FURTHER PARTICULARS OF THE MAN
OF SIN.

VER. 9-12.—Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie : that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

HAVING given this remarkable description of *the man of sin*, St. Paul proceeds to add further particulars respecting him, and he prefaces these by disclosing the true source from which this mystery of iniquity should arise. He tells us that *his coming is after* (or, according to*) *the working of Satan*.

* Dean Alford.

We learn from our blessed Lord Himself, that 'Satan abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.' To him therefore, to his secret and subtle influence and power, we are to ascribe this great work of error and departure from the truth.

Our Lord has been pleased to reveal Himself as 'the truth:' He has given us His word of truth, and He has promised to all who seek it the presence and aid of the Spirit of truth, to lead them into all truth.

The grand design of Satan has been to corrupt all this, and the Papacy has been his chief instrument in doing so. Under a profession of respect for religion and reverence for its ordinances it has led men away from the truth, and turned them to fables; the word of God has been gradually withdrawn from the people; the supposed infallible teaching of the Church has been substituted for the blessed teaching of the Holy Spirit; the

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Christian ministry has been perverted into a sacrificing priesthood; the worship of the blessed Virgin has been substituted for the worship of Almighty God; and men have been led away from the only Mediator, to trust in the intercession of saints, and to be deceived by priestly absolution and other degrading superstitions.

Nay, the whole mighty fabric of Romanism, as it has existed for ages, exercising the most marvellous power over the nations, rests upon one of the greatest falsehoods ever palmed upon the world, that the Pope is the successor of St. Peter, who was himself Bishop of Rome for twenty-five years, and bequeathed his primacy to those who should succeed him in the Apostolic See.

Now, it may be affirmed without fear of contradiction, that St. Peter never was Bishop of Rome at all. He was the Apostle of the circumcision, whose ministry was specially devoted to the Jews, and he had nothing whatever to do with Rome. And whilst, on the

one hand, there is not the smallest evidence that St. Peter ever ministered in Rome or in any part of Europe; on the other, we are able, in the clearest manner, to trace his apostolic labours amongst the Jews in many countries of Asia.*

Thus the whole system of Romanism is based upon a false foundation, and St. Paul here describes the unworthy means by which this great historical falsehood would be supported.

I. He tells us that it would be *with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.*

Fifty years ago, we were told that although claims to miraculous power had formerly been put forth by the Church of Rome, these belonged chiefly to the middle ages, and were almost forgotten amidst the intellectual light of our own times; but these professions are now wholly set aside by the works of modern and

* The reader will find this subject discussed with great ability in a recent work entitled *The Life of St. Peter*, by the author of *Essays on the Church* (Seeleys).

distinguished Roman Catholics, such works as *The Lives of the Five Saints*, by the late Cardinal Wiseman,* and *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, by Dr. Newman.

The latter writes as follows, ‘Certainly the Catholic Church from east to west, from north to south, is, according to our conception, hung with miracles. The store of relics is inexhaustible, they are multiplied throughout all lands, and each particle of each has in it a dormant, perhaps an energetic virtue of supernatural operation. At Rome there is the true cross, the crib of Bethlehem, and the chair of St. Peter; portions of the crown of thorns are kept at Paris; the holy coat is shown at Treves, the winding-sheet at Turin . . . The Agnus Dei, blest medals, the scapula, the cord of St. Francis, all are the medium of divine manifestations and graces. Crucifixes have bowed the head to the suppliant, and Madonnas have bent their eyes upon assembled

* For extracts from this work see Appendix F.

crowds. St. Januarius' blood liquefies periodically at Naples; and St. Winifred's well is the scene of wonders, even in an unbelieving country . . . Who has not heard of the abundant favours gained by the intercession of the blessed Virgin, and of the marvellous consequences which have attended the invocation of St. Anthony of Padua? St. Francis Xavier turned salt water into fresh for five hundred travellers; St. Raymond was transported over the sea on his cloak; St. Andrew shone in the dark, &c.'

The same accomplished writer gravely adds : 'I firmly believe that the relics of the saints are doing innumerable miracles and graces daily, and that it needs only for a Catholic to show devotion to any saint in order to receive special benefits from his intercession. I firmly believe that saints in their lifetime have before now raised the dead to life, crossed the sea without vessels, multiplied grain and bread, and cured incurable diseases.'

Such are the lying wonders by which the

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Church of Rome seeks to uphold her system, not in the dark ages, but in the nineteenth century.

II. In close connexion with these false claims to miraculous power, St. Paul prepares us to expect *all deceivableness of unrighteousness*. This expression is remarkable, and seems to imply that there would be deceit extensively practised for unrighteous ends. How accurately does this describe many leading ordinances of the Church of Rome, as confession and priestly absolution, penances, purgatory, masses for the dead, and other practices by which the souls of men have been deceived. And how forcibly are we here forewarned of the whole system of the Jesuits, the great end and object of which has been to uphold the Papacy by the most unscrupulous and unrighteous means.

It has been truly said that the Jesuits have the most unscrupulous agency at work that ever existed in the world, an agency prepared to set at defiance every law, human and

divine. They assume all disguises, enter families in all capacities; they are found in the senate, at the bar, in the pulpit, managing the press; their sole object being to re-establish the dominion of Rome, and to uproot everything that stands in the way of that object.

It is but too true that Rome's lying wonders are accompanied by *all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.*

III. Having drawn this dark picture, the Apostle distinctly affirms that the fact of such a system being permitted to arise amongst professing Christians is judicial. It is because *they received not the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved.*

The Papacy arose after men had fully heard the glorious gospel of the blessed God, announcing to them the great salvation so dearly purchased, so freely offered, so suited to meet all their wants for time and for eternity.

And yet, many received not the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved. *And*

for this cause, adds the Apostle, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie. This, alas! accounts but too plainly for the boasted faith of Romanists in the lying wonders of their Church; they do believe them, but it is because Almighty God has in judgment sent a spirit of delusion upon them.

What but this can explain the fact that men, who possess unquestionable talents and have enjoyed the highest advantages of education, tell us that they firmly believe in the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, in the winking of Madonnas, in the miraculous cure of incurable diseases through the relics of saints, and in persons having crossed the seas without vessels. We can only say, and we do so with feelings of sorrow and commiseration, that if they really believe these things it is because God has given them strong delusion to believe a lie; and we earnestly pray that their eyes may be opened to see and acknowledge their mistake, ere it be too

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late, and the judgment here threatened shall descend upon them, when *they all shall be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

X.

THANKSGIVING FOR PERSEVERING GRACE.

VER. 13, 14.—But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THERE are times when the sovereignty of God, and His unchanging purpose in the salvation of His people are of unspeakable comfort to us.

St. Paul evidently felt it to be so; for, having dwelt on a subject which must have

been very painful to him, involving as it did the destruction of many who profess and call themselves Christians, he turns at once to contemplate the safety of those who are the true people of God,—the called according to His purpose.

He seems to regard such as dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and hid in His pavilion, against the manifold temptations which shall assail the Church militant here on earth.

While foreseeing that many would not receive the truth in the love of it that they might be saved, and should on this account be given over to strong delusion to believe a lie, he adds, *But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.*

The connecting link between election and free grace is one of those mysteries which are far above our comprehension, and of which we

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must be satisfied to remain in ignorance until a more perfect state shall come.

It is enough for us to know that *God is love*, —that He has commanded the glad tidings of His grace to be preached to all men, and that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Whilst holding fast this great truth, and taking to ourselves the comfort and encouragement which it affords, it is nevertheless true that there is beyond it, and (in the book of God) running parallel with it, another great and important truth, which is, that the purpose of God shall stand, and that there is a spiritual and invisible Church, which *from the beginning God hath chosen to salvation.*

Let us be satisfied to receive these great truths with all humility of mind, conscious that our finite powers can never comprehend the infinite ; and let us abstain from attempting to form a system beyond what God has pleased to reveal.

Our Church has manifested great wisdom in

her acknowledgment of these truths, for, on the one hand, she has testified that ‘the offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world;’* and, on the other, she tells us that ‘the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons.’†

This is the true balance of the sanctuary, and we shall find it full of comfort to ourselves to receive it as thus defined, and to wait for the removal of difficulties to another and brighter dispensation.

We must remember, also, that the election God is *through sanctification of the Spirit*; for God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness, and they who feel within themselves godly sorrow for sin, with earnest hungering and thirsting after righteousness, have the best evidence of their election of God;

* Art. XXXI.

† Art. XVII.

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whilst those who remain careless and self-confident have no ground whatever for imagining that they are ordained to eternal life.

Wherever, then, we have satisfactory proof of the sanctification of the Spirit, wherever we see men denying themselves to ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,—we may reasonably conclude that such are chosen to salvation, and we may give thanks, as the Apostle did, for this evidence of a true work of God.

And let the humble-minded Christian rest satisfied with this, for as an old writer says, ‘Let no man soar aloft to know whether he be elected or not, but let him gather the knowledge of his election from the effectualness of his calling, and the sanctification of his life spent in obedience to the revealed will of heaven.’*

With *sanctification of the Spirit* St. Paul is

* Spencer.

careful to connect *belief of the truth*, for there is no sanctification of the Spirit but through the truth received by faith.

In our Lord's intercessory prayer for His people He says, 'Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth;' and it is remarkable that He there refers to no other means of grace, not even to the holy sacraments, but simply to the word of truth, as the chosen means appointed for this end, by Him who has magnified His word above all His name.

When we realize the place thus assigned to the word of truth by our Lord Himself, we cannot wonder at the subtlety with which our great adversary has sought to deprive men of it; and we should ever seek to hold it fast, to hide it in our hearts, to meditate upon it day and night, and to take it as the sole rule of our faith and practice.

In fighting manfully under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil, let every soldier of the cross remember that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God!

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And let us often meditate upon the great end of our calling, which is *the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the hope set before us, and the more we contemplate it, the more steadily we fix the eye of faith upon it, the more powerful the effect which it will produce upon our minds. The Apostles did so; we find it again and again expressed in their writings. Thus, St. Peter describes himself as 'a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed,' and St. Paul realizes the same blessed hope when he says, 'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'

We live in perilous times, when we have need to cherish the hope of the glory that is to follow; and it will be well for us to remember the consolation to be derived from contemplating the sovereignty of God and the safety of His people.

The 'three unclean spirits' foretold in the

∴ Apocalypse* are evidently hard at work, seeking to turn men away from the truth, and to beguile them into errors of various kinds; and there is reason to fear that this state of things will prevail yet more and more till the close of the present dispensation. Hence it is that He who knows the end from the beginning has said, 'When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith upon the earth?'

Amidst all these things it is our comfort to know that God's purpose *shall* stand, that His people *shall* be gathered, that His kingdom *shall* come, and that His will *shall* be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Rev. xvi. 13, 14.

XI.

EXHORTATION AND PRAYER.

VER. 15-17.—Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

IN the preceding verses St. Paul had expressed his thankfulness to Almighty God for the grace conferred on the Thessalonian Christians, whom he describes as having been ‘from the beginning chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,’

—words which powerfully express his sense of their safety, and of the reality of the work of Divine grace in their souls.

So far, however, from his considering this to be a reason for resting satisfied with their present attainments, or for ceasing to watch against the dangers to which they were exposed, he evidently regarded it in an opposite point of view. He says, *therefore, brethren, stand fast*, as if he had said, ‘Knowing your election of God, and taking to yourselves all the comfort which it is calculated to afford you, be encouraged, under all trials from without and temptations from within, to stand fast, for you have the strongest ground of assurance that the Lord Himself will be with you in so doing.’

This is one of the many exhortations which we have to Christian steadfastness, and the same Apostle who beseeches the Corinthians to be ‘steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,’ here says to the Thessalonians, *Stand fast and hold the tradi-*

tions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.

He here undoubtedly includes all that he had taught them concerning the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, whether orally or in writing. Originally, the teaching of the apostles must necessarily have been oral, and when St. Paul wrote these words it is probable that only one of his epistles had been written, that which the Thessalonians had already received from him.

Whatever he had taught them orally during his residence amongst them, and subsequently by the epistle referred to, he beseeches them to hold fast.

We find a similar and very striking exhortation in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, where (chap. xv. 1-4) he says, 'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in

vain. For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.'

We thus clearly learn the nature of the traditions which they had received, and which they were here exhorted to hold fast; but this gives no countenance whatever to the doctrine of the Church of Rome, that there are certain apostolical and ecclesiastical traditions which are of equal authority with the Holy Scriptures.

No such traditions are in existence; and highly as we appreciate that very ancient form of sound words which we call the Apostles' Creed, we can adduce no evidence whatever that it was composed by the Apostles.

Tradition, in the sense in which it is held by the Church of Rome, was strongly condemned by our Lord, as when He said to the Jews, 'Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect through your tradition,' and again,

‘Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’*

On this important subject we shall do well to follow the teaching of our Church, for she has wisely said† that ‘Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.’

And long before the Gospel reached our shores the same great truth was expressed by the venerable Irenæus, who says, ‘The Scriptures are perfect, as being spoken and dictated by the Word of God and His Spirit;’‡ and again, ‘We know not the dispensation of our

* Matt. xv. 6-8.

† Art. VI.

‡ Irenæus adv. Hæreses, book ii. c. 47.

salvation through any others than those of which the Gospel came to us; what they preached afterwards, indeed, by the will of God, they delivered to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.*

From an exhortation so precious it was easy and natural for St. Paul to pass to effectual and fervent prayer on behalf of those whom he addressed. He does so; he lifts up his soul *to our Lord Jesus Christ and God, even our Father*, and, filled with gratitude for the blessings of redemption, he adds, *which hath loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope, through grace.*

How precious are the truths thus almost incidentally brought before us!—that every true Christian has given to him a source of everlasting consolation,—the gift promised by our Lord when He said, ‘Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up

* Irenæus adv. Hæreses, book iii. c. 8.

into everlasting life ;' and with consolation so enduring the Apostle links *the good hope through grace*,—the good hope,—the hope that maketh not ashamed, but which entereth into that within the veil, and amidst the winds and waves of this troublesome world, is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.

The prayer of the Apostle is, that the Author and Giver of these good and perfect gifts, might *comfort their hearts, and establish them in every good word and work.*

We cannot be wrong in adopting this prayer, and in fervently offering these petitions for our Christian brethren and friends. We are elsewhere exhorted to be 'praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.' Here are petitions given by inspiration of the Spirit, and ready for our use ; here is a prayer for all saints, stamped with the Divine approval ; let us adopt it, and let us continue instant in prayer for the whole family of God, for His

people in every Church and in every land,—
that amidst their trials and sorrows, their
heaviness through manifold temptations, and
their long exercise of faith and patience, *the*
Lord may comfort their hearts, and establish them
in every good word and work.

READINGS ON CHAPTER III.

XII.

THE POWER OF PRAYER.

CHAP. III. 1, 2.—Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you : and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men : for all men have not faith.

IN studying St. Paul's Epistles we are often struck with the faith which he manifests in prayer. It seems as if the counsel of his Lord and Master was ever present with him, 'that men ought always to pray and not to faint.'

In the instructions which he addressed to the Churches he was constantly passing from

exhortation to prayer ; and he has placed on record many of the petitions which he offered for others, thus enabling us to understand how it was that like the patriarch of old, he had power with God, and prevailed.

And this man of prayer not only continued himself instant in prayer, watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, but he appealed to others for their prayers.

He does so here ; he says, *Brethren, pray for us.* There is something which seems to us wonderful in this—that this inspired Apostle, who had received his commission directly from his Lord, and whose preaching and teaching had been so often confirmed by the signs following, should thus appeal to others for their prayers. And who were the persons whom he addressed ? They were the poor converts to Christianity at Thessalonica, men greatly his inferiors in talent, in knowledge, in spiritual endowments, but doubtless men of faith and prayer.

Let no one then despise the prayers of the poor; they are unspeakably precious, and we little know how greatly we are indebted to them for the many blessings which we enjoy. We have no doubt whatever that the prayers of the pious poor, offered for their Queen, for their country, for their church, for their friends and benefactors, have often ascended as a memorial before God, and have been instrumental in bringing down rich blessings from on high.

In the instance before us, St. Paul asks their prayers for the success of the Gospel preached by himself and his fellow-labourers; he says, *Brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you.*

Thus Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, to whom a dispensation of the Gospel was committed, who was in labours so abundant, and had experienced so great success in planting churches where Christ had not been named, was anxious to be assisted and upheld in

his work by the prayers of these humble saints.

Who, then, can doubt the efficacy of prayer, or question its great importance in connexion with the ministry of the Word, and the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world? May such prayers ascend in faith and love until the Lord's Kingdom shall come, and the whole earth shall be filled with His glory!

When we consider the importance of effectual fervent prayer, we cannot but rejoice in the union for prayer which has for some time been arranged at the opening of the year, and in which Christians of various denominations have been invited to join. It is a movement in the right direction, and we trust that the Divine blessing will rest upon it, and that it may never be marred or hindered by proceedings of a disorderly or fanatical kind, but that 'the Spirit of grace and of supplication' will be shown to be 'the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.'

We welcome also with peculiar thankfulness the invitations which have proceeded from the Primate of our Church, to set apart a day for special prayer to the Great Head of the Church, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, that He would be pleased to send forth additional labourers into the vast missionary field now white to harvest.

Amidst the perils surrounding us this is a good sign of the times; and we should be wanting in gratitude to the great Hearer of prayer if we were not devoutly to acknowledge the answer already given to our petitions, in the increased number of young men who have offered themselves for missionary work, in the spirit of true devotedness which pervades our missionary colleges at home and abroad,* and in the increase of funds received for missionary objects.

Let these results encourage us to continue instant in prayer, and let all true Christians

* This forms an interesting and encouraging feature in the Church Missionary Society's Report for 1873-4.

agree to forget minor differences, and to ask with one heart and with one soul, that *the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified.*

And assuredly we have much cause to add, as the Apostle does here, *that we may be delivered from unreasonable (perverse*) and wicked men; for all men have not faith.*

It is indeed true that all men have not faith, and through the evil heart of unbelief they are often stirred up to make the most perverse and wicked opposition to the Gospel of Christ. St. Paul had experienced much of this; and whilst he preached the Gospel with unwearied zeal and overflowing love, we too often read of the unbelieving Jews contradicting and blaspheming.

It has always been so, and we must expect it to be so until the end; but however this may be, and whatever opposition may arise from perverse and wicked men, we must remember that a greater than St. Paul experi-

* Dean Alford's translation.

enced this, and we are told to 'consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds.'

And let us, as the Apostle did, appeal to our fellow-Christians everywhere for their prayers; ever realizing that He who is the hearer of prayer can silence all opposition, bring to foolishness the counsels of the ungodly, and cause darkness to be light before His servants, and crooked things straight.

And let pious laymen of all denominations, and whether rich or poor, remember that if there is any one thing, in which the faithful Ministers of Christ everywhere, and in all Churches, unite in asking at their hand, it is expressed in these words, *Brethren, pray for us.*

Pray for us! We need your prayers personally and individually, that great grace may be given unto us—that our wills may be subdued, our evil and corrupt affections overcome, and that the kingdom of heaven may be so established

in our own hearts, that there may be nothing in ourselves to quench the Holy Spirit, or to hinder the blessed work intrusted to us.

Pray for us ! We are poor earthen vessels, and whether our natural gifts or our acquirements be great or small, the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us.

Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone giveth the increase ; and if so, there is much need for your effectual fervent prayers, that, accompanied by an influence from on high, the word of the Lord may not return unto Him void, but may accomplish that which He doth please, and prosper in the thing whereto He sends it.

Pray for us ! We have to contend not only with unreasonable and wicked men, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places : and who is sufficient for these things ? But our sufficiency is of God, and if God be for us who can be against us ! Nay, in all these things we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

Then, beloved brethren, *pray for us!*
Pray for the bishops and pastors of Christ's flock; pray for all true and faithful Ministers of God's word; pray for those who have left their kindred and their homes to preach among the heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ; pray that such a blessing from on high may rest upon them that through their instrumentality *the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified*; and that our adorable Redeemer may see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

XIII.

CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE.

VER. 3-5.—But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

HAVING referred to the trials arising from unreasonable and wicked men, who were themselves without faith, St. Paul proceeds to speak of a subject which was ever welcome to him, the faithfulness of God. *But*, he says, *the Lord is faithful, who will stablish you, and keep you from evil.*

He often touched on this theme, which evidently afforded him much comfort. He does so in such passages as these, 'God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord;' * 'Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it;' † 'He is faithful that promised.' ‡ And in the instance before us, he expresses his confidence that the Lord who is faithful, would stablish the Thessalonian Christians, and keep them from evil.

Here is an unfailing source of comfort for us all; the Lord is faithful; He is faithful to that everlasting covenant which is ordered in all things, and sure—faithful to those great and precious promises which He has given us; faithful in all His dealings with His people.

There is indeed much that is mysterious in the dispensations of His providence, and this has often proved a great trial of faith to His people, but by-and-by we shall comprehend it all, and see no more as through a glass

* 1 Cor. i. 9. † 1 Thess. v. 24. ‡ Heb. x. 23.

darkly, but face to face. And it is worthy of observation that in the sublime description given us in the Apocalypse of our Lord's return in glory, we read that He is called 'faithful and true;' * as if to remind us that whatever trials may be appointed for us now, and however difficult it may be to understand the Lord's dealings with us, all shall then be fully revealed, and His faithfulness and truth shall be alike manifested in the chastenings which He has appointed for His people, and in the judgments which He inflicts on His enemies.

Christian reader, have you experienced the comfort which the faithfulness of your God and Saviour is calculated to afford you? Has it given you strength and support amidst the manifold temptations inseparable from your Christian warfare?

Are you troubled at the remembrance of your sins? Be it so. It is good to cherish that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation needing not to be repented of;

* Rev. xix. 11.

but remember that 'if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

Are you sorely buffeted by your spiritual adversary, and pressed by strong temptations? So good men have often been, 'but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.'

Do you sometimes fear lest your faith should fail, and, after all, you should turn aside from the good and right way? If left to yourselves it might indeed be so; but be of good cheer, for if you have committed the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, *the Lord is faithful, who will stablish you, and keep you from evil.*

Now, it was the full assurance of the faithfulness of God that enabled St. Paul to add, *And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.* His trust in the Divine faithfulness gave him confidence in the Lord con-

cerning them that they would persevere in the way of righteousness, and seek diligently to practise what He had commanded them.

This is the best source of confidence that we can have respecting those whom we love in the Lord. If we see that they are abiding in Christ, rooted and built up in Him, and anxious to be guided in all things by His Word, we may feel confident that all will be well with them; not because they are above temptation, but because our merciful and faithful High Priest will stablish them and keep them from evil.

The work of true religion in the soul is the work of God, and when we have satisfactory evidence that it exists, let us not dishonour its Divine Author by our doubts and fears, but confidently believe and trust that He who has begun the good work will perform it until the day of Christ.

And now the Apostle passes, as he was wont to do, from exhortation to prayer, breathing forth these holy petitions on their behalf, *the*

Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

We elsewhere read that 'love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.' And hence St. Paul's earnest desire that the hearts of the Thessalonian Christians might be directed more and more to the exercise of love to God.

This is important for us all, for whilst the grace of love affords the surest evidence of our adoption into the family of God, so it is the best preparation for entering on the kingdom of heaven. In heaven all is love; the angels which surround the throne—the glorious beings who pass in conscious innocence before it—the spirits of departed saints—have all been perfected in love, so that love must form the best and highest preparation for the world above. Nay, as a distinguished writer on this subject observes, 'We may rest in a sure persuasion that if we are graciously permitted an entrance, through the blood of

Jesus, into heavenly mansions, our love to God will be *for ever* increasing. The longer we contemplate His perfections, commune with Him in spirit, obey His commandments, conform ourselves to His moral attributes, and exercise love towards His creatures, the more deeply and largely will our love towards Himself flow onward, and it will flow to all eternity.' *

May the Lord be pleased, through the grace of His Holy Spirit, to direct all our hearts into the love of God, and to preserve us from those pernicious influences of which our Lord has warned us when He said, 'Because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold.'

With this St. Paul unites another petition, that they might be directed into *the patient waiting for Christ*. In the original it is simply 'into the patience of Christ' (εἰς τὴν ὑπομένην τοῦ Χριστοῦ); but although the words before us are rather a paraphrase than a literal transla-

* Gurney on *Love to God*.

tion, it is probable that our translators were right in considering that the patience here referred to was to be exercised chiefly in waiting for the coming of our Lord, an event which forms so prominent a subject in both these epistles.

We are often exhorted to the exercise of patience in connexion with this blessed hope; thus, our Lord has said, 'In your patience possess ye your souls.'* And He promises a special blessing to those who do so when He says, 'Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them which dwell upon the earth.' †

The Apostles follow the example of their Lord in dwelling on the importance of this grace; thus St. Paul reminds us that we 'have need of patience,' ‡ and he exhorts us to 'run with patience the race that is set before us.' §

* Luke, xxi. 19.

† Heb. x. 36.

‡ Rev. iii. 10.

§ Heb. xii. 1.

St. James says, 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.'*

Whilst the beloved disciple describes himself thus, 'I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.'†

We are thus taught by our Lord Himself, and by His inspired Apostles, the importance of patience in connexion with the long waiting-time appointed for us; and we shall be wise to make it the subject of frequent and earnest prayer that we may possess our souls in patience, ever realizing that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; and satisfied to know that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory.

* Jam. v. 7, 8.

† Rev. i. 9.

XIV.

APOSTOLICAL INJUNCTIONS.

VER. 6-9.—Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you. Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

IN our own times we have repeatedly seen good men led astray by the attractive idea of forming a perfect Church. They are offended

at the worldliness and impiety of many who profess and call themselves Christians, and they conceive it to be possible to form a Church which shall consist only of true believers, and from which all mere professors of religion shall be excluded.

They forget that such perfection never has existed at any period of the Church's history. It did not exist in the primitive Church. It did not exist in the seven Asiatic Churches which were addressed by our Lord; and we have no ground whatever for expecting it until another and brighter dispensation shall be ushered in.

Till then, we shall have to bear with much imperfection, for the Church will comprehend both the wise and the foolish virgins, the fruitful and unfruitful branches, the sheep and the goats, the nominal professors of religion and the true people of God, the calling and the election. It is the net cast into the sea, described by our Lord, which includes a multitude of fishes, both good and bad.

But are we on this account to be indifferent to the evil which surrounds us? Are we to treat it lightly, or to excuse it as something which cannot be helped, and must therefore be ignored? On the contrary, we are to be constantly on our guard against sin in ourselves or in others, and we are to condemn it as offensive in the sight of God, grieving to His Holy Spirit, and in every instance a violation of the Law of Christ.

The fact that such imperfection exists amongst professing Christians, and, at the same time, the duty of all good men to discourage what is wrong, are very clearly expressed in the words before us.

St. Paul prefaces his exhortation with great solemnity, saying, *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Nothing can be more authoritative than this, or more urgently demand attention, and the subject thus introduced is, *That ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he*

received of us. Now, be it observed that the person thus offending, and from whom they were required to withdraw, is described as *a brother*. Yes, still a brother, though tempted to a course of conduct unworthy of his Christian profession; and be it further observed, that the Apostle would not have such an one to be finally rejected, but recovered. And recovered by what means?—by ignoring his offence and treating it with levity? No; but by faithfully reprovng his conduct, and by ceasing to hold friendly and familiar intercourse with him, that he may be led to reflection and amendment.

The offence here referred to was *walking disorderly*, and not according to the rule which St. Paul had laid down down for their observance.

The original word (*ἀτάκτως*) is the same as that used by the Apostle in his first epistle to this Church, where he counsels the presbyters to ‘warn them that are unruly,’* and

* 1 Thess. v. 14.

the offence may have been any breach of social or ecclesiastical discipline, as idleness, insubordination, want of respect to superiors, or indifference to the feelings and interests of others.

In enforcing this exhortation, St. Paul appeals to the example which he had himself given them, and to the obligation laid upon them to follow it, *For yourselves know*, he says, *how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you.* No, there was in the Apostle's conduct no departure from the ordinary rules of social life, no unnecessary setting aside of anything that was good and righteous in itself. And although it was an acknowledged principle that 'they who preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel,' he had been so careful to avoid giving offence, and to manifest the most disinterested spirit, that he could add, *Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.* Not because we have

not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

Happy man! his practice had in everything corresponded with the doctrines which he taught, and he could, without presumption and without vain-glory, exhort them to follow him even as he followed Christ.

Such a man had a special right to call upon others *to withdraw themselves from every brother that walked disorderly, and not after the tradition which they had received from him.*

These verses convey to us certain valuable lessons, which we shall do well to lay to heart.

1. They clearly indicate that there will be no absolute perfection in any Church during the present dispensation, nor until the happy time when that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away. It is our duty to do what we can to reform our Churches, to correct those abuses which have crept in through human infirmity, and to bring them as near as possible to the polity and

practice set before us in the New Testament; but let us not be discouraged if, after all, many imperfections remain.

2. We are further taught that the fact of remaining imperfection forms no reason whatever for countenancing or treating lightly any inconsistency of conduct, or any departure from the law of purity and righteousness, but that it is the duty of all true Christians to reprove open offenders, and to withdraw from the society of those who persevere in a course of conduct which is unbecoming the Gospel.

3. And, finally, we are here reminded how important it is that all true Christians, and especially the ministers of religion, should seek to attain to practice so consistent that it might ever add to the force of our exhortations, and constrain those around us who see our good works to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

It should be our highest aim to be 'living epistles known and read of all men,' and it is in proportion as we attain to this that our in-

fluence will increase, and that we shall be able so to reprove, rebuke, and admonish others, as to turn them from the error of their ways, and be instrumental in the salvation of their souls.

XV.

ILL-DOING AND WELL-DOING.

VER. 10-15.—For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing.

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

It is painful to observe what a tendency there is, even in the best things, to deteriorate; and

how soon the gold becomes dim, and the most fine gold is changed.

The description of the primitive Church, which is given us in the Acts of the Apostles is beautiful indeed. We are there told that 'the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'

There is something in this which greatly commends itself to us,—something which we feel to be worthy of the Church in the days of her first love; and whilst it is probable that this primitive state of things was confined to the Church at Jerusalem, the spirit thus indicated was largely manifested in other Churches. But, alas! it was not long ere this began to be abused, and it was clearly so in the Thessalonian Church, where certain persons seem to have perverted Christian hospitality and kindness into an excuse for idleness and degrading dependence upon others.

St. Paul had from the first warned them against this, and he here repeats his exhortation, strongly reprobating the conduct referred to. He says, *For, even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now, them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

Christianity gives no countenance to idleness, or to the neglect of social duties. We are to be active in business, as well as fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; and even in the prospect of our Lord's speedy return in glory, we cannot be better employed than in the faithful discharge of our duties, however humble they may be. Let us all remember this, for it is absolutely necessary in order that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Having thus reproved the evil-doers, St.

Paul addresses the more faithful and consistent members of the Church, and adds, *But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing.*

The Christian is specially called to well-doing; he is pledged to do good,—to do so at all times, and under all circumstances. He may not be called to do great things, for comparatively few have that privilege; but he is always to be doing good. The well-doing to which he is called is very comprehensive. It embraces the conscientious discharge of relative and social duties, the relief of the poor, the advancement of true religion at home and abroad, works of piety and philanthropy; everything connected with those peaceable fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus, to the glory and praise of God.

Nor is he to allow himself *to be weary in well-doing*, though he may often feel tempted to be so, for many of the works in which he is engaged are unknown and unappreciated by others, whilst they require much exercise of patience; but it is enough, if springing from

faith and love, they are known and approved of God.

Our work, as Christians, is for eternity; the present is the grand sowing time, and the reaping time will follow in due season, but we must with patience wait for it,—we must wait for the time when the Lord Jesus shall come again ‘to give reward to His servants, the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear His name, small and great.’*

When St. Paul addresses a similar exhortation to the Galatian Church, saying, ‘Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not;’ he adds, ‘As we have opportunity let us do good, therefore, unto all men, especially to such as are of the household of faith.’ He thus indicates the nature of those works in which the Lord would have His people to be engaged until He shall return in glory,—doing good unto all men, but specially abounding in acts of brotherly-

* Rev. xi. 18.

kindness and charity towards those who are of the household of faith.

How interesting is the light in which this places the true people of God ! Their calling is to do good ; and in this there is no fear of their being mistaken. They may through infirmity of judgment sometimes err on points of doctrine or of discipline, but they cannot be wrong in doing good.

They are here reminded to give the first place in their thoughts to the household of faith ; for these have claims upon them for Christ's sake which none others have, and the Lord's new commandment requires that they should at all times be the special objects of their care ; but they are not to confine their philanthropy to these ; they are to extend it towards all men, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ' Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is

in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Oh, thus it is that the Lord, who is good unto all men, and whose tender mercies are over all His works, would have His people—His chosen people—His adopted children—to be ever showing forth His praise, by reflecting His own glorious attributes in acts of kindness and benevolence towards all men.

Having thus reproved the unruly, and given counsel to the true and faithful servants of Christ, St. Paul adds with all authority, *If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.*

But in the spirit of his Divine Master he adds, *Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

* Matt. v. 44, 45.

XVI.

THE CLOSING BENEDICTION.

VER. 16-18.—Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle : so I write.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

ST. PAUL closes this valuable epistle by commending the Thessalonian Christians to his Divine Master's care, invoking His blessing upon them, and praying that He might be with them all.

1. In doing so, he addresses the Lord Jesus as *the Lord of peace*. How expressive is this

title, and how peculiarly blessed are the thoughts which it suggests! His Name is indeed the Prince of Peace, and as we follow Him throughout His earthly career everything reminds us of it.

At His birth the song of the angelic host was 'peace on earth' in union with 'glory to God in the highest and goodwill towards men.'

Whilst He dwelt among us, His life and labours were those of the great Peace-maker, who was reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses. Peace was the word which He charged His servants to have upon their lips as they entered any house or city. Peace was the legacy which He bequeathed to His people, saying, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you.'

To purchase peace, He gave Himself for us, the just for the unjust, He bore our sins in His own body on the tree; and having reconciled us to God by the blood of His

cross, He came and preached peace to those who were afar off, and to them that are nigh.

‘Peace be unto you,’ were the words which the risen Saviour addressed to the eleven, when He appeared in the midst of them, and showed unto them His hands and His side.

His Apostles were emphatically ambassadors of peace; they viewed themselves in this light, and went everywhere preaching peace by Jesus Christ, testifying that He is Lord of all, the true Melchisedec, the King of righteousness, and the King of peace.

Let us realize the Saviour in this delightful character as *the Lord of peace*, believing and trusting in Him as such, confessing Him to be so before men, serving Him in this spirit, having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and bearing in memory at all times and under all circumstances that the Captain of our salvation, the Author and Finisher of our faith, is *the Lord of peace*.

And let us not forget that there is no peace

to be found in any other, for as an eloquent writer observes, 'One only has peace; one only can give it; know ye Him who says, "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace; in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." His name is the Prince of peace.'*

To Him alone let us look; on Him alone let us wait; to Him let us direct our prayer, in the full assurance that 'the Lord will give strength unto His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace.'†

2. Having thus addressed the Lord of peace, the Apostle prays for the Thessalonian Christians, that He would *give them peace always, by all means.*

Peace has been described as 'love reposing,' and whilst we make due allowance for human infirmity, and for the heaviness arising from manifold temptations, the true Christian should earnestly seek to possess and cultivate this

* Krummacher.

† Ps. xxix. 11.

grace ; for the frame of mind which most becomes the Christian is, that ' the peace of God which passeth all understanding, should keep his heart and mind.'

That it may be so in our experience should be the subject of our constant prayers ; and when peace is interrupted, we should regard it as a temporary chastening, the cause of which is to be found in ourselves, which calls for the most careful self-examination, and which should constrain us to draw near to the throne of grace, to make known our wants to Him who careth for us.

The ground of our peace is in itself unchangeable. It is the finished work of Christ, whereby He made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness ; and therefore, whilst our faith is firm, and we abide in Him, there is no interruption to our peace ; but so great is human weakness, that through the shadow of some passing cloud, our peace may be interrupted and a time of mental trial permitted to overtake us.

In such seasons, let us not despair, or give way to feelings of despondency, but remember that there hath no temptation taken us but such as is common to man, and that it is to such the words of the prophet are addressed, 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.'*

The person thus addressed is a good man, one who feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, yet he is described as walking in darkness and having no light; and the counsel given to him is, to trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay upon his God. Happy is he who, in such circumstances, can wait for the return of peace, trusting in the name of the Lord, and staying himself upon his God!

Now, St. Paul would have us to enjoy peace *always*, in private and in public, in the closet

* Isa. l. 10.

and in the sanctuary, in secret communion with God, and in the discharge of the duties of our calling. What a charm would this give to life! what grace to our Christian profession! And how greatly might it tend to lead others to inquire where true peace is to be found!

The Apostle prays that such peace may be enjoyed by God's people, always, and *by all means*, more literally, *in every way*;* but if in every way it must be by all means, for the blessing asked clearly includes the means appointed for this and other ends.

And after these holy ejaculations, what was there left for the Apostle to supplicate on their behalf but this, *the Lord be with you all?*

If the Lord be with us, we are safe indeed; safe from all enemies ghostly or bodily, safe amidst life's difficulties and trials, safe amidst the great fight of afflictions through which many are called to pass, safe for time and for eternity. And let us take comfort from

* The words in the original are *in omni via*.

the assurance that as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people.

The words which follow, *The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle*, seem to imply that having used an amanuensis, the Apostle verified the accuracy of what was written, by adding the closing sentence, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all*, in his own hand.

As there is no similar intimation at the close of the first epistle, it seems probable that in the interval, circumstances had occurred to render this necessary in order to prevent imposition; and this view is confirmed by the warning which he gives them in the second chapter of this epistle against hastily receiving any letter professing to come from himself or his fellow-labourers, intimating that the day of Christ was at hand.

A learned German commentator says, 'We have reason to believe that Paul (with a view to guard against fraud of every kind) dis-

tinguished by a peculiar and inimitable tracing and formation of the letters the words of the salutation.*

However this may be, the words were written by his own hand, and they were in future to form the token in every epistle.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE
WITH YOU ALL. AMEN.

* Bengel, *in loc.*



APPENDIX.



APPENDIX.

THE following extracts are given in further illustration of the views expressed on St. Paul's prophecy of *the man of sin*:—

A.

Cardinal Baronius, a devoted Roman Catholic, says,—

‘ Behold, the nine hundredth year of the Redeemer begins, in which a new age commences, which, by reason of its asperity and barrenness of good, has been wont to be called the iron age, and by the deformity of its exuberant evil, the leaden age, and by its poverty of writers, the dark age. Standing upon the threshold of which we have thought it expedient, before we proceed further, on account of the crimes which it has been our lot to behold before the door, to make some preface, by

way of admonition, lest the weak-minded should take offence, if he sometimes perceives the abomination of desolation standing in the temple. . . . The case is such, that scarcely any one can believe, or ever will believe it, except he sees it with his own eyes, and handles it with his hands, what unworthy, vile, unsightly, yea, what execrable and hateful things the sacred Apostolic See, upon whose hinges the universal Apostolic Church turns, has been compelled to suffer. . . . To our shame and grief be it spoken, how many monsters, horrible to behold, were intruded by them into that seat which is revered by angels; how many evils originated from them; how many tragedies were perpetrated; with what filth it was her fate to be besprinkled, who was without spot or wrinkle; with what stench to be infected; with what impurities to be defiled, and by these things to be blackened with perpetual infamy.*

Referring to the year 912, the same distinguished writer says,—

‘What was then the fate of the holy Roman Catholic Church? How exceedingly foul was it, when most powerful, and sordid, and abandoned women ruled at Rome, at whose will the sees were

* *Baronii Annales Ecclesiastici*, A.D. 900.

changed, bishops were presented, and—which is horrible to hear and contemplate—false Pontiffs, their lovers, were intruded into the Chair of St. Peter, who are only written in the catalogue of Roman Pontiffs, for the sake of marking the times!—for who can affirm that men illegally intruded by wicked women of this sort were Roman Pontiffs? . . . Then, as it seems, Christ evidently was in a deep sleep in the ship, when these winds were blowing so strongly, the ship itself was covered with the waves.’*

B.

Of a succession of Pontiffs, Platina, a Roman Catholic, in his *Lives of the Popes*, says,—

‘The chair of St. Peter was usurped, rather than possessed, by monsters of wickedness, ambition, and bribery. They left no wickedness unpractised.’

C.

Another eminent Roman Catholic writer, Du Pin, a doctor of the Sorbonne, gives repeated testimony to the wickedness and immorality of many of the Popes.

* *Baronii Annales Ecclesiastici*, A.D. 912.

Speaking of John Sergius, he says, 'This man is esteemed a monster, not only for his ambition and the violent proceedings he was guilty of, but also upon the account of his loose morals. He had a bastard by Merosia, the daughter of Theodora, who being a long time before highly in the favour of Adelbert, bore a great sway in Rome. This bastard son of his was afterwards promoted to the Popedom by the intrigues of Merosia, and took upon him the name of John XI.'*

Of John XII., who became Pope at the early age of sixteen, Du Pin observes, 'He was a monster in debauchery and irregularity.'

Of the ten Popes who occupied the See of Rome during the first half of the eleventh century, the same honest historian writes, 'It is no wonder that these Popes have not left us the least monument of their historic vigilance, either in councils or letters, since all their care and aim was how to gratify their ambition, and the rest of their passions, without watching over the flock of Jesus Christ.'

Of the ambition of Gregory VII. (the notorious Hildebrand) he says, 'No sooner was this man made Pope but he formed a design of becoming

* Du Pin, *Eccles. Hist. of the Tenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 106.

lord spiritual and temporal over the whole earth ; the supreme judge and determiner of all affairs, both ecclesiastical and civil ; the distributor of all manner of graces, of what kind soever ; the disposer not only of archbishoprics, bishoprics, and other ecclesiastical benefices, but also of kingdoms, states, and the revenues of particular persons. To bring about this resolution, he made use of the ecclesiastical authority and the spiritual sword which God had put into his hand, not only to maintain the faith and discipline of the Church, to reform abuses, and to punish those who were guilty of spiritual offences ; but he likewise made use of it to deprive kings of their kingdoms, princes and lords of their estates and revenues—to render them his tributaries, to dispose at his pleasure all that belonged to them, and to force them to do whatever he desired ; to engage archbishops and bishops to pay him a blind obedience, and to do nothing in their own dioceses without his order.’ *

D.

Bishop Jewel, who is described by Hooker as ‘ the worthiest divine that Christendom hath bred for the space of some hundred years,’ says,—

* Du Pin, *Eccles. Hist. of the Eleventh Century*, vol. ii. p. 211.

‘Here, methinketh, I see the secret motions of your heart. You look that I should name the Bishop of Rome, that it is he which hath suffered himself to be called by the name of God. I will not tell you in mine own words. Unless the Bishop himself so speak, I will not tell you. Mark then, and witness of my indifferency, whilst I speak hereof, that I follow not affection, but deal uprightly. Therefore I say again, unless the Bishop himself suffer himself to be called by the name of God, I will not say so of him. Then let us see what he hath written of himself, and what he hath suffered others to write. Pope Nicholas saith, *Constat summum pontificem a pio principe Constantino Deum appellari*: “It is well known that the Pope of the godly Prince Constantine was called God.” And therefore Pope Pius, in his bull saith: *Nemo audeat obedire*: “No man dare obey her, or her will, or commandments, or laws, upon pain of our curse.”

‘The Pope was well content to suffer Christopher Marcellus, one of the parasites in the Council of Lateran, to say unto him, *Tu es alter Deus in terris*: “Thou art another God in earth.” The Pope is content in such sort to have a division of tenures made between him and God, as the poet sometimes flatteringly wrote: *Divisum im-*

perium cum Jove Cæsar habet. "The Emperor parteth his rule, and holdeth half with Jupiter." In the extravagants it is set down, *Dominus Deus noster Papa*: "Our Lord God the Pope." Mark these words, "Our Lord God the Pope." In them the Pope is called "Lord," and is called "God." O merciful Lord God, which from the heavens beholdest this vanity, how great is Thy mercy in suffering this! I devise not this. His own books, his own doctors, his own decrees and decretals, speak it and set it down. *Credere . . . Dominum Deum nostrum papam . . . non potuisse statuere prout statuit hereticum censeretur*: "To believe that our Lord God the Pope might not decree as he decreed, it were a matter of heresy." It is so written there: he hath heard it, he hath seen it, he knoweth it is so; yet he suffereth it to go abroad, and thereby suffereth himself to be called God.'—*Bishop Jewel on 2 Thess. ii.*

E.

A collection of tenets extracted from the Canon Laws, by Archbishop Cranmer (see Cranmer's works, Parker Society's edition):—

'He that acknowledgeth not himself to be under the Bishop of Rome, and that the Bishop of Rome

is ordained by God to have primacy over all the world, is an heretic, and cannot be saved, as he is not of the flock of Christ.

‘ All the decrees of the Bishop of Rome ought to be kept perpetually of every man, without any repugnance, as God’s word spoken by the mouth of Peter; and whosoever doth not receive them, neither availeth them the Catholic faith, nor the four Evangelists; but they blaspheme the Holy Ghost, and shall have no forgiveness.

‘ The See of Rome hath neither spot nor wrinkle in it, nor cannot err.

‘ The Bishop of Rome hath authority to judge all men, and specially to discern the articles of the faith, and that without any Council, and may assoil them that the Council hath condemned; but no man hath authority to judge him, nor to meddle with anything that he hath judged, neither emperor, king, people, nor the clergy; and it is not lawful for any man to dispute of his power.

‘ The Bishop of Rome may excommunicate emperors and rulers, depose them from their states, and assoil their subjects from their oath of obedience to them, and to constrain them to rebellion.

‘ The Bishop of Rome may be judged of none but of God only; for although he neither regard

his own salvation, nor no one's else, but draw down with himself innumerable people by heaps into hell, yet may no mortal man in this world presume to reprehend him. For so much as he is called God he may be judged of no man.'

F.

The work entitled *The Lives of the five Saints*, edited by the late Cardinal Wiseman, contains biographical sketches of the saints who were canonized on Trinity Sunday, 1839, and attributes to these worthies a series of miracles that would have done honour to the dark ages.

Of St. John Joseph of the Cross we are gravely informed that his devotional exercises were of so heavenly a nature that 'one day, being searched for in vain through the convent, he was at length discovered in the chapel, raised up in an ecstasy so high from the ground that his head touched the ceiling!'

We are further told that his miracles surpassed enumeration, 'Even the elements obeyed him. Rain ceased at his command, when it was falling so heavily as to threaten to oblige him to seek shelter. Another time, journeying with a companion under an incessant shower, when they had

reached their destination their garments were dry, as though they had walked under the sun all the way. All nature was obedient and subservient to him. The air bore to him on its wings his stick, which he had left behind !'

Such are the 'lying wonders' which Rome unblushingly affirms in the nineteenth century, for the purpose of impressing her apostolic power on the minds of the ignorant and superstitious.

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